

IMMORTALITY AND RASSELAS:
A STUDY OF THE IDEA BEHIND JOHNSON'S APOLOGUE

By

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The thesis of this study is that Samuel Johnson's History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia, is from beginning to end an argument that man has an immortal soul. The basic message of Rasselas, I believe, is neither sceptical nor contradictory (as some recent critics have contended) but profoundly Christian. In 1752 on the occasion of his wife's death Johnson turned toward that one doctrine of Christian thought most vital in the tradition of consolation, the doctrine of immortality, and made it the topic of a celebratory sermon. I maintain that seven years later the illness and death of his mother that was the immediate occasion of the writing of Rasselas prompted Johnson once more to turn to this doctrine and this time to embody it in the form of a moral apologue.

Whether the soul was immortal was a question of special importance to Englishmen in general at the time Rasselas appeared. The various forms that the arguments for immortality took in the decades immediately preceding its appearance are the subject of the first two chapters of my study. Here I show that during this time the Christian apologist employed three main arguments to support the doctrine of immortality: the metaphysical argument sought, by demonstrating the soul's immateriality, to show it could not die; the moral argument maintained the necessity of an afterlife to provide an ultimate reckoning for the inequities of this life; and the argument from desire held that man's soul was shown immortal by his insatiable wants, his infinite longings, which could never be fulfilled by any secular pleasures. The first two of these arguments drew increasing opposition from various philosophical and heterodox religious parties as the century advanced, while the third, the argument from desire, grew stronger and, not surprisingly then, occupies a transcendent position among all three arguments in Johnson's apologue.

The final section of this study is a close critical reading of Rasselas based on the materials provided in the previous chapters. Here I maintain that the opening of the work serves as a prelude and as an introductory

argument for the immortal soul of man and that it would have been recognized as such by many contemporary readers because of similar arguments about man's uniqueness in discourses on the soul. Next, the vanity of human wishes concept, long recognized as an essential part of Rasselas, takes on additional meaning when viewed as an essential part of one of the traditional proofs of man's immortality. An examination of a less frequently treated, but equally important topic, the nature of evil in Rasselas, lends support to my belief that the argument from desire, especially, is the means Johnson employs in his apologue to the end of rendering a proof of immortality. Then I argue that the memento mori theme, meaningless without a belief in an afterlife, dominates the final third of the work and climaxes in its last chapter but one in a metaphysical discussion of the nature of the soul. When all of Rasselas is seen as an argument, initially implicit but finally explicit, for the immortality of man in a Christian scheme, the last chapter of the work, so often regarded as a critical puzzle, is a puzzle no longer.

Melvin New
Chairman

INTRODUCTION

Much can be learned from the titles of significant twentieth-century studies of Samuel Johnson. Paul Fussell's recent Samuel Johnson and the Life of Writing, for example, points up what seems to me the necessity of considering the life of Johnson (using life broadly in the sense of Johnson's entire milieu) when examining the writings of Johnson; new critical readings of Sam Johnson's works are conspicuous failures. On the other hand, once misconceptions have been established through the symbiotic network of biography and criticism they are extraordinarily difficult to eradicate. Consider the following two statements:

There has been a good deal of speculation as to what Johnson would have become had he "let himself go." He was so much the sceptic in worldly matters, he so often gives the impression, as Hogarth puts it, that he is resolved to believe nothing but the Bible, that some critics have seen in Johnson a temperament more inclined to scepticism and free thought than to religious faith. Johnson's faith came hard for him, so runs this assumption, and his notorious fear of death is thus the product of "insecure faith" and its consequence, "a terror of annihilation." This view has been generally abandoned, at least by those who have made a special study of Johnson's religious outlook. (Chester Chapin, 1968)¹

Krutch's study is consistent with more recent interpretations of Johnson that have stressed his consistent skepticism and empiricism in almost all matters but religious ones, and it now seems clear

that the many inconsistencies of his career stem from a powerful conflict between convictions sanctioned by both religion and tradition and convictions forced upon him by his temperamental receptivity to immediate experience. (William Holtz, 1974)²

Obviously, Krutch's version of "Johnson Agonistes" has survived the well-reasoned and well-documented attacks of Professor Chapin and others. In this study I hope to support Chapin's general contention of Johnson's religious orthodoxy by a specific, detailed examination of The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia, a work which Holtz believes "has no religious component" (p. 272).

The view of Rasselas I shall advance opposes not only the position held by Krutch, Holtz, and others that Rasselas reveals Johnson struggling between Christianity and religious scepticism but also new critical readings of the work which discover it to be comic and distinctly unchristian. Though I do not wish to suggest that there is no humor in Johnson's apologue, I do wish strenuously to disagree with C. R. Tracy, who maintains that "the novel . . . was set deliberately in a non-Christian part of the world . . . so that Johnson could deal with man on a purely naturalistic level Though Johnson never wavered in his own adherence to Christian belief, he seems more and more to have unconsciously confined religion to a special and secret part of his mind, and

to have drawn the creative powers of his genius from other sources."³ Tracy's influence can be seen in Alvin Whitley's reading of the work, which includes the remark that "except for the vague 'monks of St. Anthony,' Johnson deliberately avoids Christian terminology. The true faith has no place in a comic work."⁴ Recently, Patrick O'Flaherty has challenged the views of Tracy and Whitley, but in doing so he has found it necessary to posit a split psyche for Johnson once more. He argues that at the heart of Rasselas lies "a paradox of staggering dimension," that "the view of life [Johnson] is proposing without apparent misgiving in Rasselas cannot easily be reconciled with the Christian belief in God," and that "the whole work is an image of his unsettled outlook on the world."⁵ O'Flaherty concludes, "the traditional view of Johnson's religious beliefs needs careful reconsideration. . . . His powerful, empirical intellect was rarely at ease with the Christian faith, yet he could not bear the thought which rejection of Christianity would have entailed: the thought of annihilation" (pp. 207-08). By a different path O'Flaherty has arrived at the same position, it seems to me, that Krutch and Holtz occupy; thus, his view of Johnson's religious beliefs is more traditional than he realizes.

It is unnecessary, I feel, to posit a schism in the meaning of Rasselas or a split in the mind of its author. When the work is viewed from beginning to end as an argument that man has an immortal soul, those elements in it which ordinarily have been regarded as signs of Johnson's scepticism appear instead as evidence of his completely traditional Christian belief. That the nature of the soul was of special importance to Johnson at the time he wrote Rasselas is quite understandable. In 1752 on the occasion of his wife's death Johnson had turned toward that one doctrine of Christian thought most vital in the tradition of consolation, the doctrine of immortality, and made it the topic of a celebratory sermon. I believe that seven years later the illness and death of his mother that was the immediate occasion of the writing of Rasselas prompted Johnson once more to turn to this doctrine and this time to embody it in the form of a moral apologue.⁶

That the nature of the soul was of special importance to Englishmen in general at the time Rasselas appeared is indicated not only by the quantity of discussions on the topic but also by the quality of minds engaged in those discussions: Locke, Clarke, Anthony Collins, Addison, Bolingbroke, Young, Hartley, Hume, several lesser figures--and to this list I would add Johnson. My opening chapters

sketch the main directions of these discussions involving philosophers and poets, deists and Christians, from 1690 to 1759. While the selection of the publication date of Rasselas as a terminus ad quem is obvious, perhaps the selection of the date of Locke's Essay concerning Human Understanding as a starting point needs some explanation. First, Johnson's thought on the nature of the soul has previously been traced to Locke.⁷ Secondly, Locke's Essay gave rise to a new round of discussions on the old topic of the immateriality of the soul, which in turn, I believe, encouraged other types of arguments for the soul's immortality.⁸ Finally, there is no need to duplicate Don Cameron Allen's treatment of this topic from the late fifteenth to the late seventeenth century,⁹ especially if, as Philip Harth has argued, both the threat to orthodoxy and the philosophy used to defend the orthodox Christian position changed radically at the end of the seventeenth century:

With the appearance of Locke's Essay concerning Human Understanding in 1690 and the widespread acceptance of the empiricism expounded in that book, the crude sensationalism which Hobbes had taught ceased to play any important part in religious controversy. At the same time, the enormous popularity of Locke's empiricism was accompanied by a simultaneous decline in the popularity of the Cartesian theory of knowledge, and as a result an apologetics based upon the epistemology of Descartes was no longer acceptable or convincing to many Englishmen.¹⁰

Beginning with Locke's Essay, then, I treat first the metaphysical argument for the soul's immortality (also called the natural argument in the eighteenth century), which sought, by demonstrating the soul's immateriality, to show it could not die. This argument, though undercut by Locke, was still available to Johnson: it forms the basis of the penultimate chapter of Rasselas. Next I consider the moral argument--the necessity of an afterlife to provide an ultimate reckoning for the inequities of this life--and I examine the various factors which render this traditional proof of immortality less effective as the century progresses. Finally, I discuss the third of the three major proofs of immortality offered by Christian apologists in the Ages of Pope and Johnson, the argument from desire. (This label, to be sure, has less contemporary authenticity than the others I use; the argument was called "moral" also, but it seems to me important for an understanding of Rasselas to distinguish it from the moral argument mentioned above.) Based on the Christian assumption of the unique position of man in a created universe, this argument held that man's soul was immortal because of his insatiable desires, his infinite longings, which could not be fulfilled by any secular pleasures. Now, several arguments of lesser importance were also advanced for immortality during the century: arguments

were made from analogy with Nature, for example, or from the consensus gentium (most people in most ages have believed in immortality, witness ancient funeral rites, or references to the underworld in pagan writers, or the widespread belief in ghosts). Even though such arguments frequently crop up (see chapter XXXI of Rasselas, for example, for a brief version of consensus gentium concerning "apparitions of the dead"), they are relatively unimportant and very rarely are pursued at length. The other major proof available to the Christian apologist, Revelation, was ordinarily treated with preterition on the grounds that it would be unpersuasive to the non-believer. So Francis Gastrell:

It is in vain . . . to reason with such Men [concerning the] Judgment to come, out of Scripture; the only way to convince them of the Certainty of a future State is, to prove it to them from such Principles as are common to all Mankind; such as lie within every Man's reach, and such as they must acknowledge and feel in themselves to be true, without any external Authority, or Influence, to direct them.¹¹

Three major proofs, then,--the metaphysical, the moral, and that from desire--become the mainstays of the orthodox doctrine of immortality, and the objects of heterodox attack, during the first half of the eighteenth century, and all three proofs, I shall argue, are in varying degrees informing principles of Johnson's Rasselas.

The final section of this study is a close critical reading of Rasselas based on the materials provided in the previous chapters. Here I maintain that the opening of the work serves as a prelude and as an introductory argument for the immortal soul of man and that it would have been recognized as such by many contemporary readers because of similar arguments about man's uniqueness in discourses on the soul. Next, the vanity of human wishes concept, long recognized as an essential part of Rasselas, takes on additional meaning when viewed as an essential part of one of the traditional proofs of man's immortality. An examination of a less frequently treated, but equally important topic, the nature of evil in Rasselas, lends support to my belief that the argument from desire, especially, is the means Johnson employs in his apologue to the end of rendering a proof of immortality. Then I argue that the memento mori theme, meaningless without a belief in an afterlife, dominates the final third of the work and climaxes in its last chapter but one in a metaphysical discussion of the nature of the soul. When all of Rasselas is seen as an argument, initially implicit but finally explicit, for the immortality of man in a Christian scheme, the last chapter of the work, so often regarded as a critical puzzle, is a puzzle no longer.

Two basic assumptions underlie this study. The first is a generic assumption: I have treated Rasselas as an apologue, a work which "is organized as a fictional example of the truth of a formulable statement or closely related set of such statements."¹² While virtually everyone agrees that Rasselas is not a novel, several attempts have been made to prove it a satire or a comedy, attempts which have resulted, I believe, in an overemphasis on the roles of individual characters, and an unfounded assertion of the work's lack of Christian values. I realize, of course, that ultimately my generic assumption rises or falls with the cogency of the reading that it allows.

The second assumption is an historic one, perhaps best suggested by Johnson himself in his complimentary letter to Thomas Warton, upon Warton's publication of Observations on Spenser's Fairy Queen: "You have shewn to all, who shall hereafter attempt the study of our ancient authours, the way to success; by directing them to the perusal of the books which those authours had read."¹³ Now, I have in no way attempted to limit my inquiry on the topic of immortality to books which I can prove Johnson had read. Indeed, I make frequent use of two works which he categorically denies ever having opened: "Mr. Burney asked [Johnson] if he had seen Warburton's book against Bolingbroke's Philosophy? 'No, Sir; I have never read

Bolingbroke's impiety, and therefore am not interested about its confutation."¹⁴ And I would not have my argument rest on evidence such as Johnson's demonstrable affection for a Renaissance poem on the immortality of the soul by Sir John Davies,¹⁵ his possible familiarity with the edition of Thomas Blacklock's poems which includes the Scottish poet's essay on the soul's immortality,¹⁶ the probability that he not only read but reviewed two English versions of Isaac Hawkins Browne's Latin poem De Animi Immortalitate for the Gentleman's Magazine in 1754,¹⁷ or the certainty that his intimate friend Anna Williams was moved to write a response to a controversial pamphlet published in 1751 attacking the immortality of the soul.¹⁸ Rather I am concerned to establish the pervasiveness of the arguments throughout the first half of the century,¹⁹ and the remarkable degree to which these arguments are reflected in Rasselas, confident in the awareness all students of Johnson have that he was ignorant of no important philosophical or theological dispute of his time.²⁰

NOTES

¹The Religious Thought of Samuel Johnson (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1968), p. 101. Chapin cites his agreement with Robert Voitle, Samuel Johnson the Moralist (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1961), who provides an excellent discussion of Johnson's fear of death and of his belief in a future life (pp. 155-79).

²"We Didn't Mind His Saying So: Homage to Joseph Wood Krutch: Tragedy and the Ecological Imperative," ASch, 43 (1974), 273. Holtz refers to Joseph Wood Krutch, Samuel Johnson (New York: Henry Holt, 1944).

³C. R. Tracy, "Democritus Arise! A Study of Dr. Johnson's Humor," YR, 39 (1949), 310.

⁴Alvin Whitley, "The Comedy of Rasselas," ELH, 23 (1956), 69n.

⁵Patrick O'Flaherty, "Dr. Johnson as Equivocator: The Meaning of Rasselas," MLQ, 31 (1970), 205, 206, 208. The Tracy-Whitley view has been opposed also by Nicholas Joost, "Whispers of Fancy; or, the Meaning of Rasselas," ModA, 1 (1957), 166-73; unfortunately the corrective value of this essay is diminished by Joost's assertion of Johnson's fideism, in opposition to holders of "the traditional and more orthodox Christian doctrine" (p. 172). As Arie Sachs remarks in his thoroughly excellent study, Passionate Intelligence: Imagination and Reason in the Work of Samuel Johnson (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1967), pp. 113-14, "For Johnson true rationality and Christian faith are identical. . . . there is no trace of either fideism or mysticism in his religious writings."

⁶For Johnson's sermon on the death of his wife, see The Works of Samuel Johnson (Troy, New York: Pafraets, 1903), XVI, 364-76; hereafter cited as Works. As one who understands Johnson's deference to the force of genre might expect, the sermon differs from Rasselas in its emphasis on the consolatory value of Revelation (see Sermon X, pp. 185-88, for a similar emphasis). An excellent argument for the force of genre in Johnson's works is advanced by Paul Fussell, Samuel Johnson and the Life of Writing (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1971), pp. 62-90.

⁷ R. K. Kaul, "Dr. Johnson on Matter and Mind," Johnsonian Studies, ed. Magdi Wahba (Cairo, 1962), pp. 101-108. Kaul's article is accurate but sketchy.

⁸ See John W. Yolton, John Locke and the Way of Ideas (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1956), pp. 153-66, for a review of the controversies generated by the sections of Locke's Essay dealing with the soul's materiality.

⁹ Doubt's Boundless Sea: Scepticism and Faith in the Renaissance (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1964), pp. 150-85. Allen links the proliferation of discussions about immortality during this period to the increased threat to Christianity from scepticism. "The Middle Ages was keenly enough interested in eschatological matters, and this interest depended upon the actuality of immortality, which was accepted commonly and almost never demonstrated. The philosophical expositions of this concept really begin toward the end of the fifteenth century" (p. 152). Johnson undoubtedly knew classical discussions of the soul's immortality, especially those of Plato and Cicero, and was probably aware of some such discussions by the early church fathers. It is my contention, however, that a wave of scepticism gave rise to numerous arguments in favor of the soul's immortality during the first half of the eighteenth century just as it had during the Renaissance and that Johnson's Rasselas was on the crest of that wave.

¹⁰ Phillip Harth, Swift and Anglican Rationalism: The Religious Background of A Tale of a Tub (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1961), pp. 151-52.

¹¹ [Francis Gastrell], A Moral Proof of the Certainty of a Future State (London, 1725), p. 3; hereafter cited in the text.

¹² Sheldon Sacks, Fiction and the Shape of Belief: A Study of Henry Fielding, with Glances at Swift, Johnson and Richardson (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1964), p. 8. For an earlier study of Rasselas as a moral apologue see Gwin J. Kolb, "The Structure of Rasselas," PMLA, 66 (1951), 698-717.

¹³ Boswell's Life of Johnson, ed. George Birkbeck Hill, rev. L. F. Powell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934-50), I, 270.

¹⁴ Boswell, I, 330.

¹⁵ Nosce Teipsum, which Johnson "read and reread and greatly admired. His admiration for Nosce Teipsum began before 1750 and lasted until his death," W. B. C. Watkins, Johnson and English Poetry before 1660 (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1936), p. 74.

¹⁶ Johnson ridiculed certain ideas in Joseph Spence's biography of Blacklock--see Boswell, I, 466--which he knew either from its first appearance in pamphlet form in 1754 or from its inclusion in a 1756 edition of Blacklock's poems which also contained the Scottish poet's essay on immortality.

¹⁷ The attribution of the anonymous reviews is made by Arthur Sherbo, "Samuel Johnson and the Gentleman's Magazine, 1750-1755," Johnsonian Studies, ed. Magdi Wahba (Cairo, 1962), p. 152.

¹⁸ Her response was first printed in the Gentleman's Magazine, 57 (July, 1787), 557-59, where the editor identifies the notorious pamphlet as "The grand Question debated; or, an Essay to prove that the Soul of Man is not, neither cannot be, immortal. The whole founded on the Arguments of Locke, Newton, Pope, Burnet, Watts, &c. By Ontologos. Dublin, 1751." Apparently the work was a hoax, for the author, "supposed to be Dr. Kenrick," followed his first publication in the same year with one refuting it completely.

¹⁹ The absence of a short-title catalogue for the eighteenth century makes an accurate statistical study impossible, but a perusal of book reviews in the Monthly Review from 1751 to 1759 indicates that the immortality of the soul was a popular subject during the decade Rasselas was written. Davies' poem was reprinted during the period (1759); Browne's poem was translated thrice into English the year it appeared and once more, by Soame Jenyns, probably in 1759; and, in addition, about once a year during the decade a tract or essay was published arguing the topic.

²⁰ I gratefully record here a further indebtedness to the scholarship of Chester F. Chapin. His recent essay, "Johnson and Pascal," English Writers of the Eighteenth Century, ed. John H. Middendorf (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1971), pp. 3-16, points out striking parallels between the religious thought of the two writers, especially in the area of Christian evidences. In the second half of his essay Professor Chapin notes the way both "Pascal and Johnson turn [an] analysis of the human condition into an argument for religion." He continues, paraphrasing Johnson's and Pascal's argument, "Men do have intimations of immortality. They can imagine a kind of felicity which, in duration and intensity, partakes of that eternal joy which

--their reason should tell them--can never be theirs under the limitations of finite existence. Where could such a concept of happiness come from, unless from God? And why should God have implanted this concept within man, unless as a sign of man's transcendent destiny?" (p. 12). My study differs from Chapin's in focusing on a single work by Johnson and in maintaining that in that work Johnson is primarily concerned with establishing man's immortality, not the existence of God and immortality; moreover, the intellectual context on which my work depends is the specific eighteenth-century controversy over the nature of the soul. Of course, Chapin's view that the Augustinian Christianity which animated Pascal's *Pensées* still flourished a century later in all of Johnson's writings strengthens my argument about the specifically orthodox Christian meaning of Rasselas.

CHAPTER ONE
THE METAPHYSICAL ARGUMENT

That the human soul was a spiritual, not material, substance, exempt from physical dissolution, and, therefore, naturally immortal was a belief that served western civilization for two thousand years and Christianity in particular for almost that long without being seriously threatened. To be sure, threats regarded as serious arose; in seventeenth-century England, for example, the various materialisms of Epicurus (via Gassendi), Hobbes, and Spinoza menaced orthodox Christianity. This menace subsided, however, until, in one of the ironies of intellectual history, an incidental remark by John Locke about the impossibility of knowing whether matter can think produced not only more contemporary controversy than any other statement in his Essay concerning Human Understanding, but also so persistent a challenge to the metaphysical argument of natural immortality that Christian apologists eventually had to abandon it almost completely in favor of different proofs.

The key passage in the Essay occurs as Locke attempts to illustrate the limits of human knowledge:

We have the ideas of matter and thinking, but possibly shall never be able to know whether any mere material being thinks or no; it being impossible for us, by the contemplation of our own ideas, without revelation, to discover whether Omnipotency has not given to some systems of matter, fitly disposed, a power to perceive and think, or else joined and fixed to matter, so disposed, a thinking immaterial substance: it being, in respect of our notions, not much more remote from our comprehension to conceive that God can, if he pleases, superadd to matter a faculty of thinking, than that he should superadd to it another substance with a faculty of thinking For I see no contradiction in it, that the first Eternal thinking Being, or Omnipotent Spirit, should, if he pleased, give to certain systems of created senseless matter, put together as he thinks fit, some degrees of sense, perception, and thought.¹

Although Locke's reverence of Christianity seems clear even in this passage; and although earlier in the Essay he argues that the immateriality of the soul is at least as easy to believe as the existence of the body (II, xxiii, 22); and although later he demonstrates the immateriality of God, probably in response to the materialism of Spinoza and Hobbes (IV, x, 13-16), the English Christian apologists were unable to countenance Locke's position here, for they realized that it shook the very foundation of Christianity by removing the primary pillar on which the doctrine of immortality had rested. Though Locke contended that "All the great ends of morality and religion are well enough secured, without philosophical

proofs of the soul's immateriality" (IV, iii, 6), "in the minds of Browne, Stillingfleet, and many other theologians of the period, the immortality of the soul could not be accepted or demonstrated until the immateriality of the soul had first been established. Locke's readers could not understand his contention that immateriality was irrelevant to the doctrine of immortality."²

In the early part of the eighteenth century Locke's digression influenced writers to propose as fact what he had suggested merely as possibility. William Coward in Second Thoughts concerning Human Soul (1702) denied the existence of spiritual substance and maintained that the soul was a power of life and motion superadded to matter; the following year Henry Layton advanced similar ideas in several publications. The history of these and other discussions springing from this controversial section of Locke's Essay has been reviewed before; let us here, therefore, center on the Dodwell-Clarke-Collins segment of the dispute, "the most extended exchange of tracts on this subject,"³ which shows the deist and orthodox Christian in direct confrontation and which carries the metaphysical argument to its extreme. Later in the century debates about the immortality of the soul would invariably involve deist and Christian but would be fought in different arenas.

The non-juring Henry Dodwell initiated the dispute, subsequently carried to greater lengths in a series of attacks and counterattacks between the Christian metaphysician and clergyman Samuel Clarke and the noted deist Anthony Collins, when he attempted to prove that the human soul was by nature mortal and was rendered immortal only through God's grace by baptism performed by one of his ordained ministers. Perhaps Leslie Stephen was right to attribute this eccentric doctrine of natural mortality to a brain "bewildered with excessive reading, and crammed with obsolete theological curiosities."⁴ More kindly, one may view it as an attempt to provide a logical solution to the problem Dryden regarded as the chief among all the deistic objections to revealed religion: what provision does revelation make "To Indian Souls, and Worlds discover'd New?"⁵ Dodwell's scheme would allow the souls of heathens deprived of the light of revelation to perish naturally with their bodily deaths while still providing an immortal soul for Christians. Dodwell's intent aside, his work was in effect a demonstration of the mortality of the soul based on evidence from scripture and from the early Church fathers, a demonstration which drew almost immediately a refutation from Samuel Clarke.

Clarke answered Dodwell's citations of authority one by one, and this type of argument makes up a large part of his reply, but for our purposes the most important part of Clarke's response is his metaphysical demonstration of the immortality of the soul. Dodwell had maintained "that because the actual Immortality of the Soul is a Revelation of the Gospel, therefore it is not capable of being proved by Reason from the Nature of the Soul it self." Clarke held, on the other hand, that the soul's immortality was one of those doctrines "such as were capable of being in great measure discovered by the Light of Nature and right Reason," though Revelation would add to the certainty of the doctrine.⁶

Reasoning from the integrity of consciousness, Clarke argued that the soul could not possibly be material,

For Matter being a divisible substance, consisting always of separable, nay of actually separate and distinct parts, 'tis plain, that unless it were essentially Conscious, in which case every particle of Matter must consist of innumerable separate and distinct Consciousnesses, no System of it in any possible Composition or Division, can be any individual Conscious Being. (p. 730)

This is the heart of Clarke's argument, for once it is established that consciousness is not a property of matter, then it follows that it must be a property of some non-material substance and that such a substance is, by definition, naturally immortal:

When we speak of the Soul as created naturally immortal, we mean that it is by the Divine Pleasure created such a Substance, as not having in it self any Composition, or any Principles of Corruption, will naturally, or of it self continue for ever; that is, will not by any natural decay, or by any Power of Nature, be dissolved or destroyed; But yet nevertheless depends continually upon God, who has power to destroy or annihilate it, if he should so think fit. (p. 722)

Clarke, then, in his response to Dodwell, attempted to restore confidence in the metaphysical argument by demonstrating that indeed it could be shown that matter did not think. This direct contradiction not only of Dodwell, but more importantly of Locke as well, was answered by Locke's friend Anthony Collins, who was, however, no match for Clarke. The series of eight tracts exchanged between Clarke and Collins have little to do with Dodwell's original argument; instead they center on the metaphysical proof Clarke had offered for the soul's immortality and in so doing provide the source for several ideas which recur later in the century within metaphysical discussions of the nature of the soul.

Collins reasserted Locke's contention that certain knowledge of the properties of any substance was impossible, developed further Locke's suggestion that to deny the possibility of thinking matter was arrogantly to limit the power of an omnipotent God, and, again like Locke, maintained that the concept of an immaterial soul

was not necessary to Christianity. Conceding to Collins (and Locke) that man's knowledge of the essence of substances was not complete, Clarke nevertheless maintained that man knew enough to demonstrate the impossibility of thinking matter, and the existence of an immaterial soul:

some of the first and most obvious Properties which we certainly know of Matter . . . do necessarily and confessedly imply Discerpibility: But in Immaterial Beings we do not know of any such Properties, as any wise imply Discerpibility. It cannot be collected from any Property we know of Them, but that they may be such Beings as can no more be divided than annihilated Nay, the only Properties we certainly and indisputably know of them, namely Consciousness and its Modes, do prove . . . that they must necessarily be such Indiscerpible Beings. (pp. 762-63)

To the argument that an all-powerful God could certainly superadd the faculty of thinking to matter regardless of its essential qualities, Clarke replies,

I think the Argument drawn from the Divisibility of Matter, proves that Matter is not a Subject capable of such a Superaddition: And if it be not; then recurring to the Divine Omnipotence for the making out an Impossibility, is not magnifying but destroying the Power of God; as indeed all contradictory Apprehensions concerning any of his Perfections, are really and in event destructive of our whole Notion of God; and have no other Effect, than to give profane Men an Occasion of scoffing at Religion. (p. 841)

Finally, the Anglican apologist outlines three reasons why he believes the doctrine of the soul's immateriality is essential to the Christian faith. If the mind be a

system of matter, then man's thought may depend on external impulses just as the motion of a physical object does; this implies, of course, a loss of self-determination, of free will. Moreover, reasons Clarke, if the soul of man is material, what keeps us from conceiving of a material rather than a spiritual God?

Third,

If the Soul, be nothing but a System of Matter; and Thinking, nothing but a Mode of Motion, or of some other Power of Matter; the Doctrine of the Resurrection . . . will be inconceivable and incredible; and the Justice of future Rewards and Punishments, impossible to be made out. The Notion of the Soul's Immateriality, evidently facilitates the Belief of a Resurrection and of a future Retribution, by securing a Principle of Personal Individuality, upon which the Justice of all Reward or Punishment is entirely grounded. (p. 851)

The immateriality--and hence immortality--of the soul was, then, from Clarke's point of view, a major support of the entire Christian moral scheme.

Now it is important to note at this point that Clarke did not originate the integrity of consciousness method for demonstrating metaphysically the immateriality of the soul; Leslie Stephen refers to his argument as "the familiar doctrine of Descartes, elaborated into quasi-mathematical shape, and rendered more precise by help of the distinction between primary and secondary qualities."⁷ But earlier versions of the argument tended to be less

rigorous than Clarke's in their demonstration that matter could not think. For instance, in 1704, two years before the Dodwell-Clarke-Collins debate began, William Sherlock writes,

We feel in our selves something which understands, reasons, and wills; which can act freely and spontaneously; which can chuse and refuse; . . . which are of a very different Nature from all the Virtues and Qualities of Bodies, that we know of; and therefore must have a distinct and essentially different Subject also, which we call the Soul or Spirit.⁸

From here Sherlock's proof is identical to what Clarke would use: "All Material Compositions, such as Human Bodies are, may be dissolved by the separation of the parts from each other But that which is not Matter, which has no Parts, and no Extension, may be annihilated, if God so please, but can't die, as Bodies do" (p. 75). Albeit largely unoriginal, Clarke's version of the metaphysical argument--perhaps because of the dramatic nature of the confrontation with the heterodox Collins which produced it, perhaps because of its author's reputation as the most learned man of his day--became the most famous and most frequently referred to such argument throughout the first half of the eighteenth century.

Undoubtedly the widest avenue for the dissemination of Clarke's version of the metaphysical proof was William Wollaston's immensely popular The Religion of Nature

Delineated, first circulated privately in 1722 and by 1750 in its seventh edition. Wollaston's work is of primary importance in the history of ideas for its extended development of the moral argument for the soul's immortality--to be considered hereafter--but like many of the writers of this period he advanced several different kinds of arguments, the first among them being the metaphysical one. "The soul cannot be mere matter," Wollaston holds, "For if it is, then either all matter must think; or the difference must arise from the different modification, magnitude, figure, or motion of some parcels of matter in respect of others; or a faculty of thinking must be superadded to some systems of it, which is not superadded to others."⁹ The first of these possibilities is put down by a series of short arguments, including one that if self-consciousness were essential to matter, every part of matter must have it and then no system of matter could be a self-conscious unity. To the second possibility, Wollaston demonstrates that there is no relation between these modifications of matter and thinking. To the possibility of a faculty of thinking being added to matter, Wollaston writes, "But the truth is, matter seems not to be capable of such improvement, of being made to think. For since it is not of the essence of matter, it cannot be made to be so without making

matter another kind of substance from what it is" (pp. 187-89). This last point, as we shall see, becomes one of the targets of Lord Bolingbroke's attack on the metaphysical proof later in the century.

After Wollaston nothing significant was added to the metaphysical argument, although it was repeated many times. Joseph Butler cites it briefly in his well-known Analogy of Religion (1736);¹⁰ earlier and more extended is the treatment of Andrew Baxter, an avowed member of the school of Clarke and perhaps the second most popular source of Clarke's ideas: his Enquiry into the Nature of the Human Soul; Wherein the Immateriality of the Soul is Evidenced from the Principles of Reason and Philosophy (1733), appeared in two subsequent editions in 1737 and 1745. Its derivativeness can easily be illustrated:

Divisibility is such an affection of substance, as shews on the one hand, that matter, because divisible, cannot think, or be a living substance; and on the other, that spiritual substance, because thinking, cannot be divisible, or have parts.

The human soul then, having no parts, must be indissoluble in its nature, by any thing that hath not power to destroy or annihilate it. And since it hath not a natural tendency to annihilation, nor a power to annihilate itself, nor can be annihilated by any Being finitely powerful only; without an immediate act of the omnipotent Creator to annihilate it, it must endlessly abide an active perceptive substance, without either fear or hopes of dying through all eternity. Which is, in

other words, to be immortal as to the agency of all natural, or second causes; i.e. naturally immortal.¹¹

In the same year that Baxter's Enquiry first appeared, Thomas Sheridan, friend of Swift and grandfather of the famous playwright, prefaced an edition of Sir John Davies' renaissance poem on the immortality of the soul with an essay on the same subject. Sheridan's essay rehearses several different types of arguments for the soul's immortality, his metaphysical argument being derived from Clarke although Clarke is not mentioned. First consider, Sheridan says, any species of a corporal being reduced to its smallest atoms. "If each of these have a Power of thinking, they must likewise have a Self-consciousness of that Power, distinct from each other, as so many individual Men find in themselves; so that every Atome according to its different Situation, might be employed at the same time, in a different way of thinking, which in one aggregate Body would produce an infinite Confusion."¹² The immateriality of consciousness is thus proved by the impossibility of its negation. We shall return to Baxter and Sheridan later in this chapter, for each, in his discussion of the nature of the human soul, contributes to an important, subsidiary argument, namely, what is the nature of the souls of brutes.

The credibility given the metaphysical argument by the authority of Clarke and Wollaston kept it relatively free from attack until the middle of the century, when Lord Bolingbroke posthumously triggered his infamous blunderbuss. This attack was notorious and deserves to be discussed in some detail, but first, let us look briefly at two lesser known works of roughly the same period which, in their criticism of the metaphysical argument, suggest that Bolingbroke's position, although certainly a minority view, was not a solitary one.

The two works I shall now consider are so similar in their criticism of the metaphysical proof that, were it not for the anonymity of the one and the imprecise chronology and relative unavailability of the other, one would be tempted to speculate about influence between them. An Enquiry into the Nature of the Human Soul, Its Origin, Properties, and Faculties; Considered both in regard to Itself, and Its Union with the Body. In Which Several Received Opinions Are Confuted concerning Both-- I give the complete title to distinguish it from Baxter's Enquiry--appeared anonymously in 1750; David Hume's essay "On the Immortality of the Soul" was written sometime before 1755, printed in 1756, suppressed, but nonetheless circulated.¹³ The burden of the Enquiry is that the proof of the soul's immortality from its nature is

both unnecessary, due to Christian revelation, and inevitably unsuccessful. Quoting Locke favorably and taking issue both with Clarke and with Baxter, the writer argues that the unknowable nature of substance spiritual and material makes the metaphysical proof inconclusive.¹⁴

Indeed he objects to any a priori proofs:

the Way of arguing I find so much Fault with [is] raising Conclusions from abstracted Ideas of Matter in general, and two or three trifling Properties belonging to it, and not reasoning from the State of things, as we see and experience them actually existing in Nature, with all their Properties attending them, as their inseparable Retinue. (p. 46)

Similarly, Hume realizes that Locke's theory of substance, once accepted, renders the metaphysical argument difficult, if not impossible, and criticizes the travellers of the high priori road:

metaphysics teach us, that the notion of substance is wholly confused and imperfect Matter, therefore, and spirit, are at bottom equally unknown; and we cannot determine what qualities inhere in the one or in the other. They likewise teach us, that nothing can be decided a priori concerning any cause or effect; and that experience, being the only source of our judgments of this nature, we cannot know from any other principle, whether matter, by its structure or arrangement, may not be the cause of thought.¹⁵

Hume's essay differs from the anonymous Enquiry in that it goes on to deflate not only the metaphysical argument but also the moral argument and by implication all arguments in favor of the immortality of the soul except

that from revelation. "By the mere light of reason it seems difficult to prove the immortality of the soul," he writes in opening his essay; "in reality it is the gosepl, and the gospel alone, that has brought life and immortality to light" (p. 597). The work concludes, "Nothing could set in a fuller light the infinite obligations which mankind have to Divine revelation, since we find that no other medium could ascertain this great and important truth [that the soul is immortal]" (p. 604). This orthodox frame for a heterodox picture, even if sincere, is relatively unconvincing. The writer of the Enquiry, on the other hand, accepts most traditional arguments--the moral argument, the argument from desire, and revelation--and is concerned only to show the inadequacy of the metaphysical proof.

The arguments against the metaphysical proof advanced by David Hume and the unknown writer of the Enquiry were strong ones, cogently and clearly presented; less cogent because they were less clear, the polemical arguments on the same topic by Henry St. John, Lord Bolingbroke were nevertheless more important because their impact was much more pronounced. Written two or three decades before their first public appearance in 1754, Bolingbroke's philosophical works were awaited with great anticipation and received with even greater controversy.¹⁶ Partly by its denial of particular providence

but even more, I believe, by its denial of the spiritual nature of the soul, Bolingbroke's philosophy placed him firmly in the ranks of the opponents of Christianity. His attack on the doctrine of immortality proceeds, rhapsodically to be sure, on two fronts: the moral argument and its most famous proponent William Wollaston are refuted by Bolingbroke's optimistic philosophy (see below, pp. 53-54) and the metaphysical argument of Clarke and others is countered by reasoning that is by now quite familiar to us. With characteristic flair, Bolingbroke rejects all speculation about the nature of the human mind by philosophers from Plato to Berkeley:

They have reasoned about the human mind a priori, have assumed that they know the nature of it, and have employed much wit, and eloquence to account for all the phaenomena of it upon these assumptions. But the nature of it is as much unknown as ever, and we must despair of having any real knowledge at all about it, unless we will content ourselves with that which is to be acquired, a posteriori.¹⁷

A priori arguments based on the definition of the essential qualities of matter and spirit (like that advanced by Wollaston) the statesman-turned-philosopher regards merely as presumptive "playing with words in a solemn dogmatical tone." Assuming the voice of such reasoners, he writes,

We metaphysicians and ontosophists have fixed the essence of matter. It can be no other than it is represented in our abstract ideas If you suppose it modified or mixed in any system . . . it is no longer conformable to our ideas: it is

therefore no longer matter it is another substance, and must be called by another name. . . . To such reasoners it would be, I think, sufficient to say; learn that human knowledge is derived from existence: and that to be real, it must be conformable to things as they exist. (III, 515-18)

At times Bolingbroke's materialism is pronounced, as when he calls spirits "the creatures of metaphysics and theology; because in truth, considered as distinct substances, they are such. All spirits are hypothetical, except the infinite spirit, the father of spirits, the supreme Being" (III, 427). At other times it is less so: "I do not pretend to deny the possible existence of spiritual, that is, according to the present notion, of immaterial beings. I have no more right to deny that there are such, than the persons just mentioned [Descartes and Locke] have to affirm it" (III, 509); even here, however, Bolingbroke's intent is not to give hope to the spiritualists, but to refute one of the orthodox trappings of Locke's Essay, namely that although doubtful, spiritual existence is more certain than physical existence. "Upon the whole, therefore," he writes, "we may conclude without presumption against two of the greatest men of their ages, against Des Cartes, that thinking is not the essence of the soul; and against Locke, that a solid extended substance is not quite so hard to be conceived as a thinking immaterial one" (III, 512-13).

Bolingbroke's mention of Descartes is not at all surprising, for the shadow of the French philosopher fell across many eighteenth-century discussions of the nature of the soul, not only because of the obvious relationship of such discussions with Cartesian mind-body dualism, but also because of the ancillary concept Descartes developed to reinforce the view that man and brute were essentially different. How Descartes' well-known theory of animal automatism, designed to support his orthodox position, became an important weapon in the arsenal of the unorthodox is one of the most interesting chapters of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century intellectual history. We must here be content with a brief summary of the happening:

Animals are inferior to men [Descartes argued] because they neither talk, nor acquire knowledge--proof that they possess no reason. There is, then, no comparison possible between man and beast, and Descartes can say with certainty that the brute has no soul like the immortal soul of man. When the brute soul was stated to be material and mortal, the reply was soon made that from a comparison of animal and human actions, it could be concluded that what beast could do with a material soul, man also could do with a material soul. Matter is sufficient for all things. Descartes became the father of materialists when his greatest concern was to make secure the exclusive prerogative of man to a divine and immortal soul, and to hush the charges of injustice and cruelty against a God who allows feeling and innocent creatures to suffer.¹⁸

A passage from Andrew Baxter shows us that even in the eighteenth century the ironic result of the brute-machine idea was known: "Probably Cartes's opinion that there was nothing but matter and motion in brutes, hath been one reason among others, why so many of late have thought it not impossible but that it might be so in men. There is indeed nothing more common to be heard than a confident assertion that it is impossible to prove the soul to be immaterial" (p. 94).

The orthodox position was a dilemma. If thought was attributed to beasts, then it followed that they, too, must possess an immortal soul, to the Christian an awkward conclusion at the very best. If, on the contrary, beasts were considered to be purely mechanical, then there was every reason to affirm that man was also a machine, as the French materialist La Mettrie did in L'Homme Machine (1747, English translation, 1749).¹⁹

This weak point in the orthodox position having been recognized, eighteenth-century tracts which dispute the metaphysical argument very frequently bring up the issue of the souls of brutes. The author of An Enquiry into the Nature of the Human Soul (1750), for example, points out as one difficulty of Clarke's metaphysical proof, "If every thing that thinks and perceives, has an immaterial Soul . . . then it follows, that the Souls of

Brutes . . . are so; for they think or perceive in their Degree; and consequently these Gentlemen must conclude, that the Maker of them works a Miracle to annihilate them, when ever they depart from their Bodies; or else affirm, they remain in the immortal State they are entitled to" (pp. 41-2). In similar fashion, Hume notes that "Animals undoubtedly feel, think, love, hate, will, and even reason, though in a more imperfect manner than men: are their souls also immaterial and immortal?" (p. 598).

Driven to desperate ingenuity by this philosophical mousetrap, some orthodox writers replied yes to what Hume obviously intended as a rhetorical question. Confusion dominated most responses from the Christian writers, Andrew Baxter maintaining, for example, that brute souls were immaterial but different from man's, not necessarily immortal but probably so (pp. 94-95), and Thomas Sheridan asserting that brutes had souls, but mortal ones that suffered annihilation (pp. xviii-xx). John Hildrop--motivated by Father William Bougeant's extravagant (albeit satiric) hypothesis that the souls of animals were indeed immaterial and immortal, being the souls of devils waiting for judgment day--predicated a demonstration of the immortality of brute souls on Clarke's metaphysical proof of the immortality of human souls and concluded, "Who can determine the lowest Degree of human Ignorance,

and the highest Pitch of brutal Knowledge; who can say where the one ends, and the other begins, or whether there be any other Difference betwixt them but in degree."²⁰

By denying the essential distinction between man and beast, a statement like Hildrop's plays right into the hands of a Bolingbroke, who writes,

As these animal systems come to be more and more sensible to us . . . we discover in them . . . in some more, in others fewer, of the same appearances, that denote a power of thinking in us from the lowest conceivable degrees of it, up to such as are not far, if at all remote, from those in which some men enjoy it. I say some men, because I think it indisputable that the distance between the intellectual faculties of different men is often greater than that between the same faculties in some men and some other animals. (III, 526)²¹

Bolingbroke considers it established that animals think, assumes that their souls are material, concludes, therefore, that matter may think, and links this line of reasoning, perhaps somewhat weakly, to another position that we have seen argued before:

No man living has higher notions of the divine omnipotence, nor carries them further than I do. An argument fairly drawn from the power of God will determine me at any time and on any occasion I am persuaded that God can make material systems capable of thought, not only because I must renounce one of the kinds of knowledge that he has given me, and the first tho not the principle in the order of knowing [the sensory perception, in this case, of thinking animals], or admit that he has done so: but because the original principles and many of the properties of matter being alike unknown to me, he has not shewn me that it implies any contradiction to assert a material thinking substance. (III, 531)

To sum up, Bolingbroke's position against the metaphysical argument was highlighted by his use and extension of Locke's concept of the limited ability of man to know the true nature of spiritual substance (this in opposition to a priori reasoning), by his restatement of the well-known souls-of-brutes concept, and by the use of yet another idea promulgated by Locke--that to disbelieve the possibility of thinking matter was to limit the power of an omnipotent God.

With the orthodox responses to Bolingbroke the debate over the material or immaterial nature of the soul reaches its final stage. William Warburton's A View of Lord Bolingbroke's Philosophy (1754) and John Hill's Thoughts concerning God and Nature. In Answer to Lord Bolingbroke's Philosophy (1755) devote much of their attention to shoring up Wollaston's moral argument attacked by Bolingbroke, and defend the metaphysical argument primarily by citing the authority of previous Christian apologists. Warburton, for instance, begins by asserting that Clarke and Wollaston "had proved the Soul to be a thinking substance distinct from Matter: And I don't know of any body, before his Lordship (who very civilly permitted them to enjoy the honour of it for life) that pretended to question the demonstration," and later accuses Bolingbroke of not even venturing "to confute the arguments of Clarke and Baxter:

who, on the principles of the Newtonian Philosophy, have demonstrated that the soul is a substance, distinct from the body, and different from matter."²² Bolingbroke's penchant for overstatement is cleverly translated into symptoms of quixotic madness in a passage which illustrates the desire of the orthodox writers to dissociate Locke from the deist cause:

Whoever attentively considers his Lordship's Essays, will, I dare say, be of my mind, That the much reading his master Locke, who was deeply engaged with School-divines and Metaphysicians, had the same effect on his Lordship's temper, then in an advanced age, and under a bilious habit, that the reading books of Chivalry had on the prudent Gentleman of La Mancha. And, by his own confession, a man's head is soon turned by complex and abstract ideas. From henceforth the gigantic Forms of Schoolmen and the enchantments of Metaphysical Divines got entire possession of his Fancy. . . .

So again, when he says--Clarke shall not force me into Atheism; no nor Wollaston neither; What is this, but Don Quixote, up and down? dreadfully afraid that these Necromancers would, at last, force him into their enchanted castle of a Future State. (pp. 39-41)

Bolingbroke's error, argues Warburton, consists in extending Locke's view of the uncertain nature of substance beyond reasonable bounds while at the same time ignoring modifications of Locke by later philosophers. Bolingbroke's position is identical with

the state of the controversy when Locke skimmed over the argument. But Clarke and Baxter went to the bottom. They draw their conclusion, not in the presumption that they knew all the knowable qualities of matter, and that between these and

Thought, there was no perceivable connexion; but from this deep and solid truth, that from the little we do know of body, there arises a contradiction to suppose intelligence to be a quality of matter. (p. 86)

As to the soul being material, "Locke only contended for the bare possibility. His Lordship has found it to be a fact. So fairly has the disciple outdone his Master" (p. 88).²³

The context of John Hill's answer to Bolingbroke is wider than Warburton's, but his manner of proceeding is the same: he too relies on the authority of previous metaphysical proofs, especially Clarke's, and he too attempts to move Bolingbroke away from Locke's authority; in fact, he lists Locke first in a group of philosophers "who have opposed the several systems of Atheism."²⁴ Hill provides clear and accurate summaries of Locke's and Clarke's positions (pp. 270-310), but his work is probably most valuable to us as an indication of the way Bolingbroke's works were regarded by the mid-eighteenth-century Christian and as an indication of the importance generally of the belief in immortality to such a man. After tracing the lineage of the two radical heresies, atheism and deism, from Xenophanes and Epicurus respectively, Hill suggests Bolingbroke as the epitome of the latter group: "As the followers of Xenophanes, who deify matter, or deny a God, may be all answered under the names of the two already mentioned, Spinoza and Hobbes: those

of the other kind, who, acknowledging the existence of a God, disputed his providence, may be refuted in the consideration of the single Bolingbroke: He is to deists what they are to atheists, the master writer of the sect." All the members of this sect "deny the immortality of the human soul: nay they question the existence of such a thing. They call themselves deists, and will say that they entertain more honourable notions of God than others: but none besides themselves say this. Indeed no writers are more irreverend" (p. 247). That the doctrine of the immortality of the soul is a pillar of Christianity, almost a sine qua non, and that this is the doctrine most endangered by Bolingbroke's work Hill makes quite clear:

The Lord Bolingbroke expressly and repeatedly says, he doubts whether there be any such thing as an human soul, distinct from the body, and that can live after the body; and he declares himself, in some passages, of opinion, that there is not. Upon the belief of an immortality of the soul depends all Religion: those who aim to overthrow that faith, aim at the destruction of all. (pp. 305-06)

To be able to show that the soul is immortal was, then, extremely important to the believing Christian in the Age of Johnson, especially with the opposing view of the arch-deist Bolingbroke attracting so much attention. Yet to support the traditional metaphysical proof Warburton and Hill could produce no new arguments; instead they cited authority. The dispute over the metaphysical argument

had reached a standoff: on the one hand, the orthodox writers, by having accepted to a member the Lockean hypothesis of substance as unknowable,²⁵ irrevocably weakened their position from the start; on the other hand, the very nature of this hypothesis made it impossible for the heterodox absolutely to prove that indeed the soul was not immaterial.²⁶ Overall, the orthodox side was, of course, a loser in the inconclusive struggle, for it had seen what was traditionally the strongest argument for the immortality of man rendered if not impotent at least much less powerful.²⁷ Unwilling to discard a position that had stood them in good stead for so long, especially since it had not actually been disproved, Anglican writers continued to employ it, but obviously it alone could no longer carry the battle. Increasingly, other arguments for the soul's immortality were employed, and two of those arguments--the moral argument and the argument from desire--are the topic of the next chapter of this study.

NOTES

¹John Locke, An Essay concerning Human Understanding, ed. Alexander Campbell Fraser (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894), II, 192-93. All quotations from Locke are from this edition and are hereafter cited by book, chapter, and section number.

²Yolton, pp. 152-53.

³Yolton, p. 164; for a summary of the writings of Coward, Layton, and others, see pp. 153-66.

⁴Leslie Stephen, History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century (1876; rpt. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1962), I, 239. Dodwell's Epistolary Discourse Proving from the Scriptures and the First Fathers that the Soul is a Principle Naturally Mortal, but Immortalized Actually by the Pleasure of God appeared in 1706.

⁵Religio Laici, l. 179, The Poems of John Dryden, ed. James Kinsley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), I, 315.

⁶The Works of Samuel Clarke (London, 1738), III, 743. This volume of the works reprints the entire Clarke-Collins debate and will be hereafter cited in the text.

⁷Stephen, I, 240.

⁸W[illiam] Sherlock, A Discourse concerning the Happiness of Good Men, and the Punishment of the Wicked, in the Next World. Part I. Containing the Proofs of the Immortality of the Soul, and Immortal Life (London, 1704), p. 78; hereafter cited in the text.

⁹[William Wollaston], The Religion of Nature Delineated (London, 1726), p. 186; hereafter cited in the text.

¹⁰Joseph Butler, The Analogy of Religion (London, 1736), pp. 16-17.

¹¹[Andrew Baxter], An Enquiry into the Nature of the Human Soul; Wherein the Immateriality of the Soul is Evindenced from the Principles of Reason and Philosophy (London, n.d.), p. 106; hereafter cited in the text.

¹²Sir John Davis, A Poem on the Immortality of the Soul. To Which Is Prefixed an Essay upon the Same Subject, by Dr. Thomas Sheridan (Dublin, 1733), p. x; hereafter cited in the text.

¹³See Ernest Campbell Mossner, "Hume's Four Dissertations: An Essay in Biography and Bibliography," MP, 48 (1950), 37-57. Mossner is no help with the date of composition. Paul C. Davies, in "The Debate on Eternal Punishment in Late Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century English Literature," ECS, 4 (1971), p. 271, dates Hume's essay 1741-42 but with no reason given; he may be giving the date of Hume's Essays, Moral and Political, with which this essay is printed in modern editions even though it does not appear in the edition of that year.

¹⁴An Enquiry into the Nature of the Human Soul, Its Origin, Properties, and Faculties; Considered both in regard to Itself, and Its Union with the Body. In Which Several Received Opinions Are Confuted concerning Both (London: E. Owen, 1750), pp. 6-7; hereafter cited in the text.

¹⁵David Hume, "On The Immortality of the Soul," Essays Moral, Political and Literary (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1963), p. 597; hereafter cited in the text.

¹⁶Walter McIntosh Merrill, From Statesman to Philosopher: A Study in Bolingbroke's Deism (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1949), pp. 12-13. Leslie Stephen seems mistaken in his opinion that Bolingbroke's "tremendous counterblast for theologians completely missed its aim. It excited little notice, except from Warburton, whose orthodox imagination was here warmed by personal antipathy, and from the inevitable Leland" (I, 149). Merrill lists contemporary responses from Johnson, Thomas Church, Fielding, Burke, Edward Young, and Charles Bulkeley (pp. 12-13, 20n) and overlooks John Hill (see below, pp. 38-39). Merrill, incidentally, evaluates Bolingbroke's concept of immortality in terms of the Clarke-Collins debate, but with an emphasis different from mine. "Bolingbroke," he writes, "is specifically attacking Wollaston's conception of the soul and its immortality

. . . . Bolingbroke, therefore, is assuming much the same position in regard to Wollaston as Collins had taken in regard to Clarke, and Bolingbroke's arguments resemble Collins' about as closely as Wollaston's resembles Clarke's" (p. 122).

¹⁷The Works of the Late Right Honorable Henry St. John, Lord Viscount Bolingbroke (London, 1754), III, 360; hereafter cited in the text.

¹⁸Hester Hastings, Man and Beast in French Thought of the Eighteenth Century (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1936), pp. 13-14.

¹⁹I paraphrase this statement of the dilemma from Lester G. Crocker, An Age of Crisis: Man and World in Eighteenth Century French Thought (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1959, p. 84.

²⁰John Hildrop, Free Thoughts upon the Brute-Creation: or, an Examination of Father Bougeant's Philosophical Amusement, &c. In Two Letters to a Lady (London, 1742), epistle 2, pp. 36, 65-66.

²¹Arthur O. Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1936), pp. 195-98, has demonstrated that the reduction to a very slight difference of man's separation from the lower orders of living things occurred in the eighteenth century as a function of the principle of continuity. Lovejoy's classic study, esp. pp. 183-287, provides a useful complement to mine. For the literary rather than philosophical history of the idea that "Man differs more from Man, than Man from Beast," see Henry Fielding, Miscellanies, ed. Henry Knight Miller (Oxford: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1972), I, 153n.

²²[William Warburton], A View of Lord Bolingbroke's Philosophy; in Four Letters to a Friend. Letters First and Second (London, 1754), pp. 9-10, 84-85; hereafter cited in the text.

²³Cf. John Leland, A View of the Principle Deistical Writers, 5th ed. (London, 1798), II, 9: "what Mr. Locke had advanced as barely possible, for aught he knew, to Almighty Power, our author [Bolingbroke] assumes as having been actually done, and as continually done in the ordinary course of things." Roughly forty percent of Leland's work, which first appeared in 1754, treats Bolingbroke's philosophy, and in a way that is frequently very similar to Warburton's.

²⁴John Hill, Thoughts concerning God and Nature. In Answer to Lord Bolingbroke's Philosophy (London, 1755), p. 270; hereafter cited in the text.

²⁵The idea of unknowable substance was, at first, challenged by theologians. See Yolton, pp. 126-48. But apparently its acceptance by Clarke among others paved the way for the idea to receive virtually universal credence by the mid-eighteenth century.

²⁶The situation of the debate, which had been reduced to assertion versus counter-assertion with no possibility of either side winning, can be easily illustrated by the response Hill gives to Bolingbroke's remark about the intellectual faculties of men and animals (quoted above, p. 35): "I must tell this philosopher, for so he affects to call himself, that there is, and that he might have found it, an unmeasurably greater difference between the most ignorant human creature, and the half reasoning elephant; that between his lordly and magisterial self, and that most uninformed human creature. The reason is plain; their knowledge differs only in degree, that of the peasant and the quadruped in kind" (p. 517). The question of whether or not man and brute are essentially the same, which formed an important part of the debate of the meta-physical argument, comes up again in the course of discussions of the argument from desire, as we shall see in chapter two.

²⁷Interesting evidence of the weakening of the meta-physical argument is available in the reaction of an anonymous reviewer for the Monthly Review at mid-century. After summarizing such an argument from A New Method of Demonstrating from Reason and Philosophy, the Four Fundamental Points of Religion, he comments, "What conviction this manner of reasoning may carry along with it to others, we know not, but to us it appears far from being conclusive. Indeed, all the arguments that are generally adduced from the spirituality of the soul, to prove its immortality, seem to have very little, if any weight in them. The immortality of the soul must depend upon the will of its Creator, and be proved, by arguments which will be equally conclusive, whether the soul be supposed to be material or immaterial. It implies no contradiction, that we know of, to any of the perfections of the supreme Being, to suppose that he should annihilate an immaterial Being; and as to the impossibility of our conceiving how such a Being can be dissolved, or cease to be the same sort of Being, as our

author says, it signifies nothing, since it must be allowed, that he who had power to form, has likewise power to destroy," 14 (1756), 279. For a similar opinion, apparently from the same pen, see a review of Leland's View of the Deistical Writers, 12 (1755), 427.

CHAPTER TWO
THE MORAL ARGUMENT AND THE ARGUMENT FROM DESIRE

To Samuel Johnson, and to other eighteenth-century Englishmen as well, there seems to have been often no clear-cut distinction between the moral argument for the immortality of the soul and the argument to the same end from desire. In Adventurer 120, after several paragraphs which describe the vanity of human wishes, man's futile quest for secular happiness, Johnson writes,

From this general and indiscriminate distribution of misery, the moralists have always derived one of their strongest moral arguments for a future state; for since the common events of the present life happen alike to the good and bad, it follows from the justice of the Supreme Being, that there must be another state of existence, in which a just retribution shall be made, and every man shall be happy and miserable according to his works.

From this straightforward statement of the moral argument Johnson glides almost imperceptibly into the argument from desire:

It is scarcely to be imagined that Infinite Benevolence would create a being capable of enjoying so much more than is here to be enjoyed, and qualified by nature to prolong pain by remembrance, and anticipate it by terrour, if he was not designed for something nobler and better than a state, in which many of his faculties can serve only for his torment; in which he is to be importuned by desires that never can be satisfied, to feel many evils which he had no power to avoid, and to fear many which he shall never feel: there will surely come a time, when every capacity of happiness shall be

filled, and none shall be wretched but by his own fault.¹

Such a conflation is easy to understand: both arguments are moral in the sense that both are dependent on the assumption of a just God; moreover, both arguments assume that man's quest for happiness in this world is inevitably a failure. Nevertheless, the arguments differ in several important ways, and, as I trace the history of each in the century, these differences will help to explain why the moral argument was attacked (as was the metaphysical argument, but on different grounds) while the argument from desire remained unscathed and actually increased in importance.

The major promulgator of the moral argument during the eighteenth century must be William Wollaston. The argument shows up in writers earlier in the century, to be sure, but none develops it to the extent Wollaston does in The Religion of Nature Delineated. For example, William Sherlock, writing two decades before Wollaston, while he discusses in detail arguments from revelation and from the immateriality of the soul, merely pays lip service to the moral argument, listing as a final proof of the soul's immortality "that though there are many remarkable Demonstrations of the Wisdom and Justice of God in this World, yet Justice is not so equally administered here, as to

answer those Natural Notions we have of the Justice of the Divine Government" (p. 180). Wollaston, on the other hand, develops the argument at length and in a manner interesting to follow.

Wollaston first announces the basis of the moral argument: "We may conclude the souls of men to be immortal from the nature of God. For if he is (which sure no body doubts) a Perfect being, He, as such, can do nothing inconsistent with perfect or right reason. . . . He cannot but deal reasonably with all His dependents" (pp. 199-200). An examination of the general and usual state of mankind, however, reveals that life is filled with toil and trouble from birth to death, that all our enjoyments are mixed at best and our expectations frequently disappointed, that neither youth nor adulthood nor old age is happy, that even envied states are sorrowful, and that domestic bliss is nonexistent (pp. 205-08). "Seriously, the present state of mankind is unaccountable, if it has not some connexion with another, and be not as it were the porch or entry to it" (p. 207). The contrast, in other words, between a just creator and an unjust creation necessarily implies the existence of a life after death where the inequities of this life can be rectified. Wollaston even suggests that the contrast is provided intentionally by God to illustrate this point:

perhaps . . . He has so ordered things on purpose, that from the various compositions of men's circumstances with the natural effects of their virtues and vices, and the many inequalities arising thence, they might see the necessity and certainity of another state: and that for this reason there should always be some remarkable instances of oppress innocence and flourishing wickedness. (p. 204)

Only one objection appears to this rather pat argument, and Wollaston shows himself aware of it by raising it in order to dismiss it curtly. The objection, popularized by Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury, is that virtue will make men happy in this life, and that, therefore, moral men have no real need to believe in rewards hereafter. Wollaston's answer is the standard orthodox response, that virtue tends to this effect but is more often outweighed by worldly circumstances that men cannot control.²

Wollaston's thin reply does not indicate the seriousness of the threat to the moral argument from Shaftesbury's philosophy; on this point a modern student of the aristocratic philosopher has written,

Much of Shaftesbury's polemic against the religion of his time was directed against those who denied that there was a moral order evident in the present life because they thought this would make belief in future retribution all the more necessary in a supposedly just universe. This procedure, which Shaftesbury describes as "building a future state on the ruins of virtue," can only succeed in undermining our faith in Deity itself.³

Shaftesbury is perhaps best described as an agnostic on the issue of personal immortality, but his attempts to establish the intelligibility of the world as presently experienced clash as violently with the moral argument as if he had been immortality's avowed enemy. His exaltation of secular experience and, consequently, his lack of concern with the question of immortality except as it impinged on his concept of the workings of this world are reflected in a comment he makes after reading a letter by John Locke written shortly before Locke's death: in contrast to the orthodox Christian sentiment of his former mentor "that this life is a scene of vanity, that soon passes away, and affords no solid satisfaction but in the consciousness of doing well, and in hopes of another life," Shaftesbury writes, "I ask no reward from heaven for that which is reward itself. Let my being be continued or discontinued, as in the main is best. The author of it best knows, and I trust Him with it."⁴ Perhaps because of his relative indifference to the issue, Shaftesbury does not advance an argument in favor of immortality that appears to spring from the school of moral sensibility with which he is often associated (see below, pp. 74-78). Rather, Shaftesbury's view that this world was a just and moral one seriously undercut one important orthodox Christian argument for the soul's immortality, and

Shaftesbury showed no concern for the consequences.

All this became evident later in the century, when his position--adopted by Bolingbroke among others and coupled with an increasing moral relativism and empiricism, prominently displayed by Hume--seriously impaired the efficacy of the moral argument.

In 1733 Thomas Sheridan can still advance the moral argument without qualification:

For can it consist with the Goodness of God, to let the sincerely pious and virtuous Man, and one altogether corrupt and vicious, end alike, and undistinguished in the Dust? When the former hath done such Actions, as no Reward in this World can be an Equivalent for; and the other committed such Crimes, as no Tortures here, could sufficiently punish. (p. xvii)⁵

By 1749, however, David Hartley, in his "Of a Future State after the Expiration of this Life," has to hedge somewhat in his moral argument, perhaps due to Shaftesbury's influence:

Virtue is, in general, rewarded here, and has the Marks of the Divine Approbation; Vice, the contrary. And yet, as far as we can judge, this does not always happen; nay, it seems to happen very seldom, that a good Man is rewarded here in any exact Proportion to his Merit, or a vicious Man punished exactly according to his Demerit. Now these apparent Inequalities in the Dispensations of Providence, in subordinate Particulars, are the strongest Argument for a future State, in which God may shew his perfect Justice and Equity, and the Consistency of all his Conduct with itself.⁶

Recognizing that a disproportion between happiness and virtue in the present life "must be established previously, before we can draw an Argument for a future State from this, and the moral Character of the Deity, put together" (p. 364) and also recognizing that a universe governed by a just God should reflect a moral scheme--"Virtue has always the fairest Prospect, even in this Life; and Vice is always exposed to the greatest Hazards" (p. 363)--Hartley equivocates. He advances the moral argument while at the same time downplaying one of its bases, the unhappiness of earthly existence: "It is probable, that most or all Men receive more Happiness than Misery in their Passage thro' the present Life" (p. 359).

While Shaftesbury's influence on Hartley is conjectural, his influence on the blind Scottish poet Thomas Blacklock can be demonstrated. In his "On the Immortality of the Soul: An Essay" (1756), Blacklock advances, in addition to the metaphysical argument and the argument from desire, a proof of the soul's immortality from the attributes of God:

If we compare the character of God, as a wise superintendent and generous benefactor of nature, with the state in which things at present appear; where virtue is often depressed and afflicted, and vice apparently triumphs; it will seem highly inconsistent, that in no future scene, vice should be treated with the punishment and infamy it merits, and virtue receive that happiness and honour . . . it has reason to expect.

'Tis true, this subject has been too much exaggerated; and [here a note reading "Shaftesbury"]

some pious men have weakly thought, the best way to convince us, that order and happiness prevailed in a future state, was to persuade us, that there was none at all in this. . . . Let us on the contrary candidly own, that virtue is sovereignly and solely good; least by depreciating her charms, we obliquely detract from the character of God himself.⁷

Both in Hartley and in Blacklock, then, the erosive effect of Shaftesburian optimism on the moral argument is evident; however, just as was the case with the metaphysical argument, the most vociferous attack on the orthodox position occurs in the writings of Lord Bolingbroke.

Taking issue specifically with Wollaston's statement that "if there is not a future state, God is neither good nor just," Bolingbroke maintains that divines who so argue "betray the cause of God to the atheist, when they joyn with him in so many points, that nothing remains to be opposed to him, in defence of God's existence, but the problematical and futile reasonings they employ to prove a future state" (V, 323). He continues, "the doctrine of future rewards and punishments, having been precariously established, and neither generally nor entirely believed, by those who believed the existence of God on better foundations, there is a real danger to this first principle of all religion arising from the hypothesis against which I contend" (V, 355). Besides asserting a confederacy between the divines and the atheists, Bolingbroke,

thinking it arrogant for man to assume like Wollaston that the entire world was created for his happiness, suggests rather that "the several parts of the material world, like the machines of a theater, were contrived not for the actors, but for the action. . . . The nature of every creature . . . is adapted to his state here, to the place he is to inhabit, and, as we say to the part he is to act" (V, 377).⁸ Bolingbroke's optimism will admit occasional evils in the universal drama, but no necessary general misery: "Let us be convinced . . . in opposition to atheists and divines, that the general state of mankind in the present scheme of providence is a state not only tolerable, but happy" (V, 382).

John Hill's response to Bolingbroke's attack is somewhat meager: he restates the moral argument briefly and comments, "in this there is nothing absurd surely; but this man ridicules it" (p. 580). William Warburton answers at greater length. He explains that, to produce the supposed confederacy of atheist and divine, Bolingbroke has "jumbled . . . two controversies together; and, in the confusion . . . commodiously slipped in one fact for another" (p. 28). The nature of the divines' argument varies, depending on whether the antagonist is atheist or deist.

In disputing with the Atheist, the principle held in common, was the present unequal distribution of Good and Evil. So that to cut off their conclusion from it, of No God, they proved his being and attributes. . . . With the Deist, the common principle was the being and attributes of God. Therefore, to bring them to the allowance of a Future State, they proved the present unequal distribution of good and evil; and from thence inferred, that there must be such a State. (p. 26)

Warburton concludes this point, "Well then, the whole amount of his Chimerical Confederacy rises to this, That Divines and Atheists hold a principle in common; but in common too with all the rest of mankind; namely, that there are irregularities in the distribution of moral good and evil" (p. 29).

Warburton continues in the same vein against Bolingbroke's optimism, the other source of his attack on the moral proof. The maxim--whatever is, is right--as applied by Lord Bolingbroke is impious cant, says Warburton, who contrasts his application with the poet's:

Mr. Pope's Essay on man is a real vindication of Providence against Libertines and Atheists; who quarrel with the present constitution of things, and deny a future State. To these he answers that whatever is, is right: and the reason he gives, is, that we see only a part of the moral system, and not the whole. . . . Lord Bolingbroke's Essays are a pretended vindication of Providence against an imaginary confederacy between Divines and Atheists. . . . His Lordship . . . endeavours to overthrow their common principle, by his Friend's maxim, that whatever is, is right; not because the present state of our moral world . . . is necessary for the greater perfection of the whole, but because our moral world is an entire system of itself. (pp. 80-81)

The tendency for both the heterodox and the orthodox sides to make use of Pope's sententia during the moral argument is further shown by Hume's treatment of it (to be discussed in a moment) and by its appearance in the Latin poem De Animi Immortalitate (1754) by Isaac Hawkins Browne. William Hay renders Browne's position succinctly: "Whatever is, is right, take all in view: / If nought survives us, the reverse is true."⁹

To an impartial reader today Warburton clearly seems to get the better of Bolingbroke, but historical perspective tells us that here was a case where feeling prevailed over logic, for Warburton was engaged in a rearguard action against optimistic tendencies which rendered the moral argument for the immortality of the soul simply unpalatable to many late eighteenth-century Englishmen. In fact, the optimistic tendencies which negated the moral argument had a similar effect on the entire orthodox position; when Joseph Butler attempted to counter these tendencies in The Analogy of Religion (1736), he realized the necessity of establishing through natural theology the orthodox doctrines that natural theology had weakened. Thus, his opening chapters dealt with the existence of a future life, the rewards and punishments of a life hereafter, and God's moral government in this world.

Specifically written to oppose the Shaftesburian influence, Butler's Analogy is considered one of the most effective defenses of orthodoxy in the century. It ultimately failed, however, for the same reasons Bolingbroke's view won out over Warburton's, reasons which will become clearer through a comparison of the moral argument with the more easily digested argument from desire.¹⁰

David Hume's essay on the soul provides a convenient bridge between the two arguments we are considering in this chapter, though the Scottish philosopher himself deals with only one of them. When he writes on moral arguments, that is, arguments "derived from the justice of God," he finds

these arguments are grounded on the supposition that God has attributes beyond what he has exerted in this universe, with which alone we are acquainted. Whence do we infer the existence of these attributes? It is very safe for us to affirm, that whatever we know the Deity to have actually done is best; but it is very dangerous to affirm that he must always do what to us seems best. (p. 598)¹¹

"Whatever is, is right" is acceptable to Hume it seems, but not "whatever will be, will be right." The moral argument--predicated on the demonstration of the injustice of this world and the assumption of divine moral attributes exceeding those displayed here--falls victim to the twin forces of optimism, with its emphasis on the

completeness of the secular moral system, and empiricism, with its stress on the secular limitations of human knowledge. While earlier in the century Wollaston could maintain that God's ends were served and the moral argument supported by "some remarkable instances of oppress innocence and flourishing wickedness," Hume's point of view makes such moral distinctions impossible:

Heaven and Hell suppose two distinct species of men, the good and the bad; but the greatest part of mankind float betwixt vice and virtue. Were one to go round the world with an intention of giving a good supper to the righteous and a sound drubbing to the wicked, he would frequently be embarrassed in his choice, and would find the merits and demerits of most men and women scarcely amount to the value of either. (pp. 600-01)¹²

The rapacity with which Hume attacks the moral argument (and the metaphysical argument for that matter) makes noteworthy the absence of a similar attack on the argument from desire, as was observed late in the nineteenth century by the militant agnostic Thomas Huxley. After tracing the influence of Hume's essay on nineteenth-century theologians, especially Dr. Richard Whately, Archbishop of Dublin, Huxley comments,

It is remarkable that Hume does not refer to the sentimental arguments for the immortality of the soul which are so much in vogue at the present day; and which are based upon our desire for a longer conscious existence than that which nature appears to have allotted to us. Perhaps he did not think them worth notice. For indeed it is not a little strange, that our strong desire that a certain occurrence should happen should be put forward as evidence that it will happen.¹³

Besides making clear his own religious position, Huxley's statement illustrates that the argument from desire, rather than the moral argument, became the proof Christian apologists primarily used during the late eighteenth and nineteenth century to demonstrate the soul's immortality.

The ascendancy of the argument from desire can be explained, it seems to me, by contrasting its premises with those of the moral argument. First, we have seen a growing reluctance in the eighteenth century to view the world in terms of oppressed innocence versus flourishing wickedness.¹⁴ Whereas the moral argument demanded such a division, the argument from desire needed only a recognition that the world failed to satisfy man's infinite yearnings. Man's general dissatisfaction with the world, whether that world were just or unjust, could be asserted without running headlong into deistic (i.e., optimistic) opposition. Furthermore, and this is the second point of contrast between the two arguments, while the moral argument hinged on the attributes of God, the argument from desire depended primarily on the attributes of man. It was an argument "taken from human Nature,"¹⁵ and though it presupposed a moral God who would not allow man to desire in vain, emphasis was always on the hopes and fears of men, attributes which might be verified

empirically. A sketch of the development of this argument through the century will show its being refined from an early crudeness which Huxley persists in attributing to it into a highly sophisticated and persuasive psychological argument for man's immortality.

If we turn to William Sherlock again, we find in 1704 an early example of a limited version of the argument, centering on the desire of men to live forever and the desire for fame as indications of immortality and including the half-facetious remark, "And this is the only difference between Men and Brutes; the Principle of Self-preservation is the same in both; but this admir'd Reason deceives Men into the vain Hopes and Desires of Immortality, which Brutes never think of" (pp. 175-76). Probably more popular and accessible than Sherlock's work, the Spectator in several numbers mentions briefly the argument from desire. At least one of these numbers Johnson appreciated particularly: "One of the finest pieces in the English language is the [Spectator] paper on Novelty, yet we do not hear it talked of. It was written by Grove, a dissenting teacher."¹⁶ Despite Johnson's unwillingness to call the non-conforming minister a clergyman, his admiration for Henry Grove's essay is unrestrained and completely understandable when we recognize that Spectator 626, Mon.,

Nov. 29, 1714, is in large part a proof of man's immortality drawn from his insatiability. Grove asks, "Is not [man's] Fondness for Novelty . . . a convincing Proof of a future State? . . . when I see [men] hurry from Country to Town, and then from the Town back again into the Country, continually shifting Postures, and placing Life in all the different Lights they can think of; Surely, say I to my self, Life is vain, and the Man beyond Expression stupid or prejudic'd, who from the Vanity of Life cannot gather, He is designed for Immortality."¹⁷ Another contributor to the Spectator, John Hughes, writes in No. 210, Wed., Oct. 31, 1711,

since Nature . . . does nothing in vain, or, to speak properly, since the Author of our Being has planted no wandering Passion in it, no Desire which has not its Object, Futurity is the proper Object of the Passion so constantly exercis'd about it; and this Restlessness in the present, this assigning our selves over to farther Stages of Duration, this successive grasping at somewhat still to come, appears to me . . . as a kind of Instinct or natural Symptom which the Mind of Man has of its own Immortality. (II, 322-23)

The argument would eventually develop along the lines suggested here by Hughes and Grove, emphasizing man's dissatisfaction with the present and the secular and his insatiable appetite for the future and the infinite; but not until the theological writings of Francis Gastrell some fifteen years later and the poetry of

Edward Young some twenty years after Gastrell would this development become easily discernible.

A more famous contributor to the Spectator, Joseph Addison, had also used the argument from desire, though in a less concrete manner and tinged with traces of another argument which was to be developed by the school of moral sensibility. In Spectator 111, Sat., July 7, 1711, he speaks of the proof of immortality from the soul's "Passions and Sentiment, as particularly from its Love of Existence, its Horrour of Annihilation, and its Hopes of Immortality, with that secret Satisfaction which it finds in the Practice of Virtue, and that Uneasiness which follows in it upon the Commission of Vice" (I, 457). Addison seems here to mix the argument from desire not only with the argument from conscience¹⁸ but also with what we might term an argument from sentiment. Note particularly the mention of passions and sentiments as a basis for the proof and the suggestion of an inner, secret satisfaction found in the practice of virtue. This type of argument is too important a part of later eighteenth century discussions of immortality to be ignored, but, since it is relatively unimportant to a reading of Johnson's Rasselas, I reserve treatment of it until the conclusion of this chapter.

Of all early versions of the argument from desire perhaps the most widely known throughout the eighteenth

century is the soliloquy on immortality that opens the final act of Addison's neo-classical tragedy Cato (1713). James Boswell knew this speech well and repeated it (along with some less elevated verse) upon his first sight of London in 1762; and in 1768 Laurence Sterne parodied the soliloquy in Yorick's famous apostrophe to sensibility near the end of his Sentimental Journey.¹⁹ The stage directions at the beginning of act five of Addison's drama describe "Cato solus, sitting in a thoughtful posture: In his hand Plato's book on the immortality of the soul [probably the Phaedo]. A drawn sword on the table by him." Cato's opening lines present the argument from desire with its frequent concomitant, the idea of man's horror of annihilation:

It must be so--Plato, thou reason'st well!
 Else whence this pleasing hope, this fond desire,
 This longing after immortality?
 Or whence this secret dread, and inward horror,
 Of falling into nought? why shrinks the soul
 Back on herself, and startles at destruction?
 'Tis the divinity that stirs within us;
 'Tis heav'n itself, that points out an hereafter,
 And intimates eternity to man.²⁰

Certainly there are tendencies in Addison, if not in Shaftesbury, toward a sentimental argument for immortality, and a comment by Fielding's Parson Adams--"I never heard of any plays fit for a Christian to read, but Cato and the Conscious Lovers"²¹--puts Addison's play in dubious company; nevertheless, the distance

between the intimations of immortality suggested in Cato's soliloquy and those in later writers of the sentimental mode is substantial, and a further examination of the argument from desire will show that it continued to develop relatively independent of the school of moral sensibility.

Continued conflation of the argument from desire is evident in William Wollaston's treatment, as he joins it not with the arguments of conscience and sentiment (as had Addison), but with the argument based on consensus gentium:

that great expectation, which men have, of continuing to live in another state, beyond the grave, has I suppose been commonly admitted as one proof, that they shall live That they generally have had such an expectation, can scarce be denied. The histories of mankind, their deifications, rites, stories of apparitions, the frequent mention of a hades, with rewards and punishments hereafter, &c. all testify, that even the Heathen world believed, that the souls of men survived their bodies. (p. 208)

In its early version the argument from desire is frequently mixed with other types of arguments primarily, I think, because in this form it is somewhat superficial and certainly capable of little elaboration. To argue that because we desire immortality we are immortal is not to convince the unbeliever, whose response is likely to be that of Thomas Huxley:

If my intense desire to see the friend, from whom I have parted, does not bring him from the other side of the world, or take me thither; if the mother's agonised prayer that her child should live has not prevented him from dying; experience certainly affords no presumption that the strong desire to be alive after death, which we call the aspiration after immortality, is any more likely to be gratified. (p. 208)

By 1725, however, with the appearance of Francis Gastrell's Moral Proof of the Certainty of a Future State, the argument from desire has attained independent status. Gastrell's work, in fact, has a two-fold importance, both as perhaps the most extended eighteenth-century example of the argument and also as its chief source for Edward Young, whose Night Thoughts was further to popularize it throughout the remainder of the century.²² Gastrell's treatment includes the older version of the argument--it mentions the impossibility of setting "Bounds to our Desires of living" and the human impulse to be famous (pp. 13-14)--but transcends it frequently, especially in its development of the vanity of human wishes theme:

Whatever View we take of Man, we shall find the Prospect continually enlarging upon us, till it open into another World. But, if that be only an imaginary State, then every thing we meet with here will come under the Character either of Mystery, or Delusion, and we shall be sure of nothing but Vanity, and Vexation of Spirit. (p. 6)

Developing his thesis from characteristics of the human psyche, Gastrell continues,

If Man were made for this Life only, and not design'd to aim at any thing beyond it, why were not all his Desires and Expectations confined within the Compass of his Being? When the Time allotted us to appear in is but a Span long, why are we continually reaching out into Eternity, and never satisfied with any thing less than infinite? (p. 7)

The argument from desire permits the Christian apologist once more to insist on the essential difference between man and brute and to be on much firmer ground than he was during the metaphysical argument. Thus Gastrell writes,

There are no other Beings, within our Observation, which are liable to Sorrow and Affliction but Man; at least he is the only Being that knows himself to be miserable, and is capable of complaining that he is so. For, whatever Pain we can suppose the Beasts that perish feel, it is all in present: They have no Concern for what is past, nor any Apprehensions of what is to come. . . . And why our Souls disquieted within us, by the Fears and Apprehensions of Evils to come; if there were not some future Dispensation, which concerned us more, and deserved to be more in our Thoughts, than any thing, about which we are now employed can do? And what Reason can be alleged, why we should be troubled for any thing that is past, and which, by being past, could not possibly create us the least Uneasiness, without our own Reflection upon it? (pp. 10-11)

Man is the only animal with a sense of time, the only animal that fears or hopes for things not immediate, thereby distinguishing himself from brute creation and partially accounting for his terrestrial discontent. This concept becomes almost a commonplace in literature on the soul in the eighteenth century. Gastrell's contemporary William Wollaston argues,

if the souls of men are mortal (extinguishd at death), the case of brutes is by much preferable to that of men. The pleasures of brutes, tho but sensual, are more sincere, being pall'd or diminish'd by no diverting consideration Their sufferings are attended with no reflexion They are void of cares; are under no apprehension for families and posterity; never fatigue themselves with vain inquiries, hunting after knowledge which must perish with them; are not anxious about their future state, nor can be disappointed of any hopes or expectations. (pp. 210-11)

And Edward Young, some twenty years after Gastrell and Wollaston, in the seventh of his Night Thoughts four different times compares man and beast in similar fashion. Near the beginning of the poem he suggests briefly, then denies, that heaven is kinder to a shepherd's flocks than to the shepherd himself.²³ Later he discusses the topic at length:

Or own the Soul immortal, or invert
All Order. Go, Mock-Majesty! go, Man!
And bow to thy Superiors of the Stall;
Thro' ev'ry Scene of Sense superior far:
They graze the Turf untill'd; they drink the Stream
Unbrew'd, and ever full, and un-embitter'd
With Doubts, Fears, fruitless Hopes, Regrets, Despairs

Their Good is Good intire, unmixt, unmarr'd;
They find a Paradise in ev'ry Field,
On Boughs forbidden where no Curses hang:
Their Ill, no more than strikes the Sense; unstretched
By previous Dread, or Murmur in the Rear. (p. 148)

Still later Young returns to the idea that man's sense of time distinguishes him from beasts and is one of the sources of his terrestrial discontent; he asks concerning man,

Why by Reflection marr'd the Joys of Sense?
 Why Past, and Future, preying on our Hearts?
 And putting all our present Joys to Death?
 Why labours Reason? Instinct were as well;
 Instinct, far better; what can chuse, can err:
 O how infallible the thoughtless Brute! (p. 158)

Man is truly "fatally distinguisht" (p. 161) from beast if indeed he is not immortal, but once distinction is established, especially on psychological terms, the argument for man's immortality is almost accomplished. The opening of Johnson's Rasselas, as we shall see, depends to a large extent on this idea.

Gastrell's argument from desire, even as expanded by him in the ways we have just examined, definitely retains an ethical component, and parts of his tract could just as easily appear in works concentrating on the moral argument. Consider, for instance, this passage:

The troubles and miseries of human Life . . . which we cannot, by any care or foresight of our own prevent, are so many, and make such deep impressions upon the Soul, that should we, at our leaving this World, take a true estimate of all the common events that have happened to us in it, there are very few of us, who, upon a just balance, would find the Good to exceed the Evil. (p. 33)

Still, Gastrell stresses, in conjunction with the futility of the search for human happiness in this world, not the moral attributes of God, which demand future reparation, but the psychological attributes of men, which commit them to the futile search and condemn them to secular

discontent; echoing Henry Grove he writes, "For so are we made, that, whatever work we are engaged in, we are often desiring to shift our posture; and, which way soever our thoughts are employed, we frequently want to have them turned into another channel" (p. 27).

Here is the argument in a brief but complete form, again in Gastrell's words:

Since therefore it is manifest that Man, with all his knowledge and understanding, is not capable of obtaining that end, which is proper and agreeable to his nature, in this Life; it necessarily follows, that God hath appointed some other state for him. For it is impossible to conceive . . . That [God] should give him capacities that could never be filled, and inclinations and desires that could never be answered; that he should deceive him with false hopes, amuse him with the prospect of good things at a distance, which he could never reach . . . This, I say, is no way reconcileable to any notions we have of God. (pp. 71-72)

More modest instances of the argument are found in works we have cited before by Thomas Sheridan and David Hartley. The argument is not clearly defined in Sheridan, though it seems to me that the following quotations show traces, at least, of the position:

Shall Man then, for whom all these Things [the natural universe] were made, not have his End answered? I mean, shall he not be translated to a World of Happiness, since Happiness is his only Pursuit, and that he cannot have it here. (p. xxi)

the most evident Argument for the Continuance of our Being hereafter, is that Principle within us, by which Nature . . . hath plainly pointed out another World to us. This never dies, for Self-preservation, both here and

hereafter, is so plainly imprinted in us, that we cannot seriously think of Annihilation, but with the utmost Horror. (pp. xxii-xxiii)

Hartley specifically links horror of annihilation²⁴ with the argument from desire in a passage which also reinforces the suggestion I made earlier that this argument is less dependent than the moral argument on the attributes of God:

The great Desire of a future Life, with the Horror of Annihilation, which are observable in a great Part of Mankind, are Presumptions for a future Life, and against Annihilation. All other Appetites and Inclinations have adequate Objects prepared for them: It cannot therefore be supposed, that this Sum total of them all should go ungratified. And this Argument will hold, in some measure, from the mere analogy of Nature, though we should not have recourse to the moral Attributes of God; but it receives great additional Force from considering him as our Father and Protector. (p. 385)

Unquestionably more Englishmen read the argument from desire in verse than in the prose of Gastrell, Sheridan, and Hartley put together. The verse I refer to is Edward Young's Night-Thoughts on Life, Death, and Immortality (1742-46), perhaps the most popular poem of the second half of the eighteenth century.²⁵ Evidence exists, moreover, that at least among Johnson and his circle and probably among most literate Englishmen Young's poem was highly regarded specifically for its treatment of the doctrine of immortality. In his life of Akenside, Johnson wrote, "One great defect of his [Pleasures of

Imagination] is very properly censured by Mr. Walker, unless it may be said in his defence that what he has omitted was not properly in his plan." Johnson then quotes from John Walker's Exercises for Improvements in Elocution:

[Akenside's] picture of man is grand and beautiful, but unfinished. The immortality of the soul, which is the natural consequence of the appetites and powers she is invested with, is scarcely once hinted throughout the poem. This deficiency is amply supplied by the masterly pencil of Dr. Young, who, like a good philosopher, has invincibly proved the immortality of man, from the grandeur of his conceptions and the meanness and misery of his state; for this reason a few passages are selected from the Night Thoughts, which, with those from Akenside, seem to form a complete view of the powers, situation, and end of man.²⁶

Both Night the Sixth and Night the Seventh (1744) in the poem to which Mr. Walker refers are concerned explicitly with reclaiming the infidel by means of arguments for immortality. In the preface to the former Young writes, "Few Ages have been deeper in Dispute about Religion, than this. . . . I think [these disputes] may be reduced to this single Question, Is Man Immortal, or is he not?" The poet continues, "I have been long persuaded, that most, if not all, our Infidels . . . are supported in their deplorable Error, by some Doubt of their Immortality, at the Bottom. And I am satisfied, that Men once thoroughly convinced of their Immortality, are not far from being Christians" (pp. 109, 110). Prefacing Night the Seventh Young stresses again the particular relevance of his topic

to his time: "The Soul's Immortality has been the favourite Theme with the Serious of all Ages. . . . Of highest Moment this Subject always was, and always will be. Yet this its highest Moment seems to admit of Increase, at this Day; a Sort of occasional Importance is superadded to the natural Weight of it" (p. 136). Since he is interested in reclaiming a lost soul, Young specifies that he will advance "Arguments derived from Principles which Infidels admit in common with Believers" (pp. 110-11); in fact, he concludes Night the Seventh with an exaltation of Revelation, but this presumably occurs after the infidel has been reclaimed.

The sections which concern us here appear in Night the Seventh, where Young presents his proofs "drawn from Man" (p. 139),²⁷ for the most part types of the argument from desire. Man's terrestrial discontent the subject, the poet asks why cottager and king alike are disquieted in this world.

Is it, that Things Terrestrial can't content?
 Deep in rich Pasture, will thy Flocks complain?
 Not so; but to their Master is deny'd
 To share their sweet Serene. Man, ill at Ease,
 In this, not his own Place, this foreign Field
 Where Nature fodd'ers him with other Food,
 Than was ordain'd his Cravings to suffice,
 Poor in Abundance, famish'd at a Feast,
 Sighs on for something more, when most enjoy'd.
 Is Heav'n then kinder to thy Flocks, than Thee?
 Not so; thy Pasture richer, but remote. (p. 141)

Man's hope and his never-ending undefined quest, the poet suggests, while sources of discomfort in this world, are

signs and proofs of immortality:

His Immortality alone can solve
That darkest of AEnigmas, human Hope;
Of all the darkest, if at Death we die.
Hope, eager Hope, th' Assassin of our Joy,
All present Blessings treading under-foot,
Is scarce a milder Tyrant than Despair.
With no part Toils content, still planning new,
Hope turns us o'er to Death alone for Ease.
Possession, why, more tasteless than Pursuit?
Why is a Wish far dearer than a Crown? (p. 143)

The vanity of human wishes (with Young emphasizing human wishes as much as vanity) leads directly here to a proof of the soul's immortality. Later the poet repeats virtually the same argument:

Why Life, a Moment; Infinite, Desire?
Our Wish, Eternity? Our Home, the Grave?
Heav'n's Promise dormant lies in human Hope;
Who wishes Life Immortal, proves it too.
Why Happiness pursu'd, tho' never found?
Man's Thirst of Happiness declares It is
(For Nature never gravitates to nought)
That Thirst unquencht declares It is not Here. (p. 157)

These passages, coupled with the man-beast comparisons discussed earlier, make it evident that the argument from desire is indeed the informing principle of this section of Young's Night Thoughts.²⁸

Earlier we observed William Wollaston, in the course of his moral argument for the immortality of the soul, suggest that perhaps God placed inequity in the world that man "might see the necessity and certainty of another state." Without the disadvantage of opening the door to detractors of Christianity by stressing the inequity of

this world and with the advantage of stressing to an increasingly secular society the attributes of man rather than the attributes of God, the argument from desire obtains the same conclusion as Wollaston's moral argument, as this statement from Thomas Blacklock's use of it reveals:

That insatiable desire of good, which scorns every possession already in our power, and ever pants for untasted delights, is likewise a strong argument of the Immortality of the Soul It is not to be thought, that the great Author of the human constitution would kindle and enlarge the desires of his creatures so far beyond the proportion of any sublunary good, with any other view than to give their expectations a nobler aim; and to teach them, that they were formed for eternity and unbounded perfection. (pp. 223-24)

Three major arguments, then, the metaphysical, the moral, and that from desire, were available to the mid-eighteenth-century Christian apologist to demonstrate the immortality of man. Yet another proof, let us call it for convenience the argument from sentiment, became popular in the second half of the century, though it never became a mainstay of the orthodox position, and it is worth regarding briefly, first in an exaggerated and then in a serious form.

Near the end of Laurence Sterne's Sentimental Journey (1768), Yorick, "in quest of melancholy adventures" because, as he tells us, "I am never so perfectly conscious of the existence of a soul within me, as when I am entangled in

them," seeks out the mad but attractive Maria, who having previously lost her lover and her senses has recently been deprived of her father and her goat. Yorick sits down beside her, alternately wiping her tears and his, "and as I did it," he says, "I felt such undescribable emotions within me, as I am sure could not be accounted for from any combinations of matter and motion. I am positive I have a soul; nor can all the books with which materialists have pester'd the world ever convince me of the contrary."²⁹ Most likely, Sterne manages in this passage to undercut the argument from sentiment with the suggestion that Yorick's emotions are more sexual than theological; without calling his own belief in immortality in question, he has devastating fun at the expense of the man of feeling who would assert, in opposition to the equally foolish materialist, that his sensibility demonstrates his immortality.³⁰ But this argument was advanced seriously as well.

For a non-satiric representation of the argument from sentiment let us turn to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's The Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar (1762), a work remarkable both as a clear and concise statement of Rousseau's mature religious position and as an indication of the blending of orthodox and heterodox views which comprised it. The last of the three fundamental principles Rousseau's vicar establishes as basic to his faith,

that man is free and has an immortal soul, suggests the orthodox nature of most of the Profession.³¹ Moreover, the vicar's expressed admiration of Samuel Clarke's metaphysics, his opposition to Locke's theory of thinking matter, and his general acceptance of the metaphysical argument for the soul's immortality, all indicate the traditional strain in Rousseau's religious thought (pp. 6, 23-25, 30). The moral as well as the metaphysical proof shows up in the Profession, again in a perfectly orthodox way; the vicar says, "Even if I had no other proof of the immaterial nature of the soul than the triumph of the wicked and the oppression of the just in this world, that alone would prevent me from doubting it. . . . I should say to myself: Everything does not end for us with this life; at death, everything goes back into order" (p. 30). What then is the reason for discussing the Profession as an example of the heterodox, or at least untraditional, argument from sentiment?

Not well defined for the very reason that it is not traditional, the argument from sentiment nevertheless plays an important role in Rousseau's fictionalized statement of his faith. The rhetorical climax of the work is the vicar's famous apostrophe to conscience, which I shall quote in full:

Conscience! conscience! divine instinct, immortal and celestial voice; sure guide of an ignorant and limited being, but intelligent and free; infallible judge of good and evil, who

make man like God! it is you who make the excellence of his nature and the morality of his actions; without you, I feel nothing in me which raises me above the beasts, except the sad privilege of wandering from error to error with the help of an unguided understanding and an unprincipled reason. (pp. 43-44)

On first glance the meaning here may seem similar to Addison's in Spectator 111, but when the passage is considered in the light of the rest of the discourse, it becomes apparent that Rousseau's understanding of conscience is quite different from Addison's. Just three paragraphs before, the vicar has told us that "the acts of conscience are not judgments, but feelings: although all our ideas come to us from outside, the feelings which weigh the worth of those ideas are within us." He continues, "For us, to exist is to feel; our sensitivity incontestably comes before our intelligence, and we have feelings before ideas" (p. 42). Louis Bredvold is surely correct when he describes the action of the apostrophe as "the ethics of feeling borrowing the phraseology of the philosophy which it is contradicting;"³² the essence of conscience for Rousseau has nothing of the moral connotation it must have had for Addison. Rousseau's belief, expressed via the vicar's vocative, that man is separated from beast only by his inner immortal feelings is truly an argument from sentiment.

Whether the influence of the school of sensibility with its emphasis on the inner feelings of man made Englishmen in the second half of the eighteenth century more receptive to the argument from desire or whether both sensibility and the orthodox argument independently found fertile ground at this time is a moot point. Enough has been said to indicate the approximate position of the arguments about immortality in the sentimental tradition. Like other parts of this tradition, the argument from sentiment tended to emphasize the sufficiency of human instincts and emotions to a degree that made holders of the orthodox Christian ethic more than a little uncomfortable, and this alone would account for Johnson's refusal to recognize such an argument in his writings. We shall see, then, that not the argument from sentiment, but the metaphysical, moral, and, especially, the argument from desire form the basic intellectual context of Johnson's Rasselas.

NOTES

¹Works, V, 24-25; in Samuel Johnson the Moralist, pp. 161-62, Robert Voitle discusses this passage from Adventurer 120 with slightly different emphasis, regarding what I term the argument from desire as Johnson's "favorite variant" of the moral argument.

See A Letter to Samuel Johnson, LL. D. on the Subject of a Future State (1787), the joint product of Dr. John Taylor and Johnson himself, for another instance of Johnson's rehearsing the moral argument, the argument from desire, and the metaphysical argument. (The rare document is conveniently reprinted in an appendix to James Gray's Johnson's Sermons: A Study [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972], pp. 235-44.) I consider this a separate instance, rejecting the implication made by J. H. Hagstrum in "The Sermons of Samuel Johnson," MP, 40 (1943), 258-59, that Taylor plagiarized this portion of the letter from Johnson's manuscript sermons in his possession at that time. It seems more likely that Johnson repeated phrases in the letter that he had used elsewhere than that Taylor would attempt a plagiarism not only from unpublished manuscripts but also from Rasselas.

²For an extended answer to Shaftesbury along these lines, see Butler's Analogy of Religion, pp. 57-63.

³Stanley Grean, Shaftesbury's Philosophy of Religion and Ethics: A Study in Enthusiasm (Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 1967), p. 93.

⁴Grean, pp. 96-97.

⁵Sheridan, incidentally, shows the same tendency that Johnson does to conflate the moral argument and the argument from desire; see especially pp. xvii-xxi.

⁶David Hartley, Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations (London, 1749), II, 388; hereafter cited in the text.

⁷Thomas Blacklock, Poems, 2nd ed. (London, 1756), p. 227; hereafter cited in the text.

⁸For the larger intellectual context of Bolingbroke's opposition to anthropocentric teleology, see Lovejoy, pp. 186-89.

⁹William Hay, The Immortality of the Soul. A Poem, Translated from the Latin of Isaac Hawkins Browne, Esq. (London, 1754), p. 28. The passage is Book 2, ll. 141-43 in the original.

¹⁰To consider in depth the wider theological implications of Shaftesburian optimism suggested in this paragraph is beyond the scope of this work. I do think it indicative of the importance of the issue of immortality in that wider context that Butler begins his attempt to include the religion of Nature within the religion of Revelation by trying to prove without Revelation the immortality of the soul.

¹¹The eleventh section of Hume's Enquiry concerning Human Understanding contains an attack on the moral proof quite similar to this; the attack is refuted by Leland, I, 303-11.

¹²This quotation from Hume epitomized a movement toward moral relativism that has been chronicled, in somewhat different terms, by Paul C. Davies, "The Debate on Eternal Punishment in Late Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century English Literature." Davies traces the dulcification and ultimate disappearance of the doctrine of eternal punishments in the writings of both orthodox churchmen and avowed enemies of Christianity. Interestingly, he places Pope, Swift, and Johnson in opposition to this process. For evidence that the debate was international, see Jean-Jacques Rousseau, The Creed of a Priest of Savoy, trans. Arthur H. Beattie (New York: Ungar, 1956), pp. 32-33.

¹³Thomas H. Huxley, Hume with Helps to the Study of Berkeley (New York: Appleton, 1896), pp. 207-08; hereafter cited in the text.

¹⁴This, of course, is a generalization to which many conspicuous exceptions could be found. Samuel Richardson, for example, shows no such tendency toward relativism in his fiction. In Clarissa (1747-48) none of the main characters question the existence of man's immortal soul, and not only Belford but even Lovelace rehearses the moral argument: upon learning of Clarissa's rape, Belford writes, "O Lovelace! Lovelace! had I doubted it before, I should now be convinced that there must be a World After

This, to do justice to injured merit, and to punish barbarous perfidity! Could the divine Socrates, and the divine Clarissa, otherwise have suffered?" In his next letter to Belford Lovelace says, "As every vice generally brings on its own punishment, even in this life, if anything were to tempt me to doubt of future punishment, it would be, that there can hardly be a greater than that which I at this instant experience in my own remorse," letters of June 14 and June 15, ed. George Sherburn (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962), pp. 306, 314.

¹⁵Gastrell, p. 81.

¹⁶Boswell, III, 33; Baretti apparently shared Johnson's admiration of this essay: see Boswell, IV, 32.

¹⁷The Spectator, ed. Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), V, 142; hereafter cited in the text.

¹⁸Although Sheridan writes, "Among all the Arguments I can bring for the Soul's being distinct from the Body, and intended for another State, I cannot conceive one stronger than that of Conscience, by which I mean an inward Approbation, or Dislike of our Actions, according to their moral Goodness or Turpitude" (p. xv), this argument shows up relatively infrequently. Hartley treats it briefly: "The Voice of Conscience within a man; accusing or excusing him, from whatever Cause it proceed, super-natural Impression, natural Instinct, acquired Associations, &c. is a Presumption, that we shall be called hereafter to a Tribunal; and that this Voice of Conscience is intended to warn and direct us how to prepare ourselves for a Tryal at the Tribunal. This, again, is an Argument, which Analogy teaches us to draw from the Relation in which we stand to God, compared with earthly Relations. And it is a farther Evidence of the Justness of this Argument, that all Mankind in all Ages seem to have been sensible of the Force of it" (pp. 388-89).

¹⁹Boswell writes, "When we came upon Highgate hill and had a view of London, I was all life and joy. I repeated Cato's soliloquy on the immortality of the soul, and my soul bounded forth to a certain prospect of happy futurity. I sung all manner of songs, and began to make one about an amorous meeting with a pretty girl, the burthen of which was as follows:

She gave me this, I gave her that;
And tell me, had she not tit for tat?

I gave three huzzas, and we went briskly in," Boswell's London Journal: 1762-1763, ed. Frederick A. Pottle (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1950), pp. 43-44.

For Sterne's parody, see A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy by Mr. Yorick, ed. Gardner D. Stout, Jr. (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1967), pp. 277-78. Stout notes that Johnson had reservations about Cato's dramatic qualities, but against this must be weighed his lavish praise of its "just sentiments in elegant language;" see Lives of the English Poets, ed. George Birkbeck Hill (1905, rpt. New York: Octagon, 1967), II, 132-33.

²⁰The Miscellaneous Works, in Verse and Prose, of the Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq. (London, 1765), II, 143.

²¹Henry Fielding, Joseph Andrews and Shamela, ed. Martin C. Battestin (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961), p. 226.

²²For Young's debt to Gastrell, see Isabel St. John Bliss, "Young's Night Thoughts in Relation to Contemporary Christian Apologetics," PMLA, 49 (1934), 66.

²³[Edward Young], The Complaint: or, Night-Thoughts on Life, Death, and Immortality (London, 1755), p. 141; hereafter cited in the text.

²⁴Recall Addison's mentioning man's horror of annihilation, above, pp. 62-63. The numerous studies of Johnson's fear of death make much of his horror of annihilation, frequently regarding it as a sign of religious scepticism or proto-existentialism. To my knowledge no one has pointed out that such horror was a regular part of many eighteenth-century arguments in favor of the soul's immortality. Hume feels the necessity of refuting the idea as one "artificially fostered by precept and education" (p. 599); "Were our horrors of annihilation an original passion, not the effect of our general love of happiness, it would rather prove the mortality of the soul: for as nature does nothing in vain, she would never give us a horror against an impossible event" (p. 604). My observation lends support to the thesis cogently argued by J. H. Hagstrum, "On Dr. Johnson's Fear of Death," ELH, 14 (1947), 308-19, "that Johnson . . . considered fear of death a rational and necessary result of his religious position" and "that the emotion in its essence is easily recognizable as that religious sensibility which had always been prominent in Christian piety" (p. 309).

²⁵"In 1750 the first complete collection appeared of all nine Nights, a book destined to be reprinted in more editions than any other book of the eighteenth century over the next hundred years," Isabel St. John Bliss, Edward Young (New York: Twayne, 1969), p. 109.

²⁶Lives of the English Poets, III, 418-19.

²⁷Drawn from nature, the proofs of Night the Sixth specifically involve analogies from Nature and the ever-present chain of being concept, along with an argument based on man's worldly achievements. The proof from analogy, similar in many ways to the argument from design in favor of the existence of God, attained some prominence in the century; see Hartley, p. 385, for another presentation of it and Hume, pp. 602-04, for a refutation.

²⁸That Young brings up the moral argument briefly and only twice in Night the Seventh supports my contention that it was becoming less important at mid-century than it had been earlier. Young's use of the argument, by the way, shows him tangling with the Shaftesburian threat:

Has Virtue Charms?--I grant her heav'nly Fair,
But if unportion'd, all will Int'rest wed;
Tho' That our admiration, This our Choice.
The Virtues grow on Immortality;
That Root destroy'd, they wither and expire.
A Deity believ'd, will nought avail;
Rewards and Punishments make God ador'd. (pp. 173-74)

See also p. 147.

²⁹Sentimental Journey, pp. 270-71; see pp. 68-69 for a somewhat similar passage. As Stout's note to the latter suggests, Sterne in France would be especially aware of the controversy generated by the French materialists like La Mettrie. On the other hand, there is evidence that he was also aware of English arguments about the soul's immortality, especially the metaphysical argument, which he parodies in The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman, ed. James Aiken Work (New York: Odyssey Press, 1940), pp. 263-64.

³⁰For a discussion of this passage along these lines, see Arthur Hill Cash, Sterne's Comedy of Moral Sentiments: The Ethical Dimension of the Journey. (Pittsburgh: Duquesne Univ. Press, 1966), pp. 91-94. That materialists were the primary target of the cult of feeling in discussions on

immortality is suggested also by a passage in Ann Radcliffe's The Romance of the Forest (1791), where man's appreciation of the sublimity of the universe prompts Clara to exclaim, "O! how expressively does this prove the spirituality of our being! Let the Materialist consider it, and blush that he has ever doubted," 6th ed. (London, 1799), III, 90; and by Rousseau, The Creed of a Priest of Savoy, pp. 14, 25, and passim.

³¹The Creed of a Priest of Savoy, p. 26; hereafter cited in the text.

³²Louis I. Bredvold, The Natural History of Sensibility (Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1962), p. 24. I am indebted to Bredvold's discussion throughout this paragraph.

CHAPTER THREE

A READING OF RASSELAS

1. INTRODUCTION: "things temporal . . . things eternal"

That the vanity of human wishes is an important part of the meaning of Johnson's Rasselas was evident even to its earliest readers. James Boswell writes that the tale

leads us through the most important scenes of human life, and shews us that this stage of our being is full of "vanity and vexation of spirit." To those who look no further than the present life, or who maintain that human nature has not fallen from the state in which it was created, the instruction of this sublime story will be of no avail. . . . Johnson meant, by shewing the unsatisfactory nature of things temporal, to direct the hopes of man to things eternal. Rasselas, as was observed to me by a very accomplished lady, may be considered as a more enlarged and more deeply philosophical discourse in prose, upon the interesting truth, which in his "Vanity of Human Wishes" he had so successfully enforced in verse. (I, 341-42).

Despite attempts by a few modern critics to play down the significance of this theme in Rasselas, Boswell's view is pretty much accepted as an accurate assessment of at least part of the apologue.¹ Some recent commentators, to be sure, have been inclined to stress the psychological to the exclusion of the religious connotations of this theme; thus, Sheridan Baker finds that Rasselas treats

the "psychological irony of the mind itself, always wishing, always imagining happiness even in the midst of happiness, always, by its very nature, incapable of satisfaction."²

A large part of the triumph of Ariele Sachs' Passionate Intelligence is his ability to deal simultaneously with the psychological and religious threads in Johnson's thought, and his work has had a great influence on my ideas about Rasselas;³ but Sachs is not concerned to give a reading of Rasselas or of any of Johnson's works per se nor does he note in particular the relationship between the insufficiency of the world to the spirit of man and the argument from desire for man's immortality, a relationship which I hope to demonstrate is central to the meaning of Rasselas. In a sense, then, what follows is an attempt to show that Johnson did precisely what Boswell thought he did in Rasselas, that is, from the unsatisfactory nature of things temporal he encouraged the hopes of man for things eternal.

In writers like William Wollaston and Francis Gastrell we have seen two major arguments for man's immortality, the moral argument and the argument from desire, develop directly out of a presentation of the vanity of human wishes. This in itself suggests at least the strong possibility that Rasselas contains an implicit argument

along the same lines, especially in view of the conspicuous presence of the third major argument for immortality in the penultimate chapter of the work. Rather than give a chronological reading of Rasselas from beginning to end which points out the vanity of human wishes motif (already, as I have just indicated, sufficiently established by others) and ties this motif repeatedly with the arguments summarized in my second chapter, I have chosen to offer several essays on topics closely related to the immortality argument in Rasselas, each of which contributes directly to my primary aim. In this way I hope not only to avoid belaboring the obvious or the already demonstrated but also to call attention to several topics in Rasselas which have been hitherto ignored and which are, in my opinion, extraordinarily important.

My topics, arranged roughly in chronological order, begin with an examination of the opening of the apologue and the situation of Rasselas in the happy valley--a situation which is illuminated, I believe, by an awareness of similarities to it in arguments about immortality in the eighteenth century. Next I examine what has frequently been recognized as a leitmotif of Rasselas, the choice of life, and I show the close connection between Johnson's use of this motif and its use in the argument from desire. That the argument from desire is relatively more important

than the moral argument in Rasselas becomes clear from an examination of the depiction of evil in the work, a topic that until now has hardly been broached. Finally, I argue that memento mori, a concept impossible without a belief in personal immortality, thematically dominates the last third of Rasselas; in this final essay I follow the work's chronology quite closely, for much of the impact of the eschatological theme depends upon the dramatic repetition and accumulation of reminders of death and decay. The conclusion to my study is an interpretation of the apologue's vexed conclusion: here I find that the final chapter of Rasselas follows naturally from the argument of the previous chapter (so often ignored by critics) and is perfectly explicable in relation to it. Both enforce the theme of man's immortality that runs throughout the work.

2. THE PENSIVE PRINCE: "evils recollected . . . evils anticipated"

The title of the second chapter of Rasselas--"The Discontent of Rasselas in the Happy Valley"--suggests the ironic juxtaposition which controls the meaning of the beginning of the work. Having opened his apologue with a description of an Edenic location where "all the diversities of the world were brought together, the blessings of nature were collected, and its evils extracted and excluded,"⁴ Johnson promptly produces his titular hero, somehow discontented in a land where everyone's desires are immediately granted. The contrast between the physical state of the happy valley and the mental state of one of its most important inhabitants (Rasselas, recall, is "the fourth son of the mighty emperor") is further emphasized when the prince himself notices his uniqueness from the rest of animal creation:

Rasselas . . . having for some time fixed his eyes upon the goats that were brousing among the rocks, began to compare their condition with his own.

"What," said he, "makes the difference between man and all the rest of the animal creation? Every beast that strays beside me has the same corporal necessities with myself; he is hungry and crops the grass, he is thirsty and drinks the stream, his thirst and hunger are appeased, he is satisfied and sleeps; he rises again and is hungry, he is again fed and is at rest. I am hungry and thirsty like him,

but when thirst and hunger cease I am not at rest; I am, like him, pained with want, but am not, like him, satisfied with fullness. The intermediate hours are tedious and gloomy; I long again to be hungry that I may again quicken my attention." (p. 611)

The question Rasselas asks--what makes the difference between man and beast?--is perhaps the basic question of pagan as well as Christian humanism, with the locus classicus to be found in Cicero's De Officiis. Here, after noting similarities between man and beast which include the instinct "to hunt and provide everything necessary to maintain life, such as nourishment, shelter and other similar requirements," Cicero remarks,

The greatest difference between man and beast, however, is this: that the beast adapts itself to what is at hand and what is present only to the extent that a physical reaction impels it; it perceives the past and the future only slightly. But man is endowed with reason, by which he perceives inferences and sees the causes of facts, that is, he is fully aware of what we might call their antecedents or their origins; he compares resemblances and connects with or weaves into present circumstances those in the future; he easily sees the entire course of life and prepares beforehand the things necessary to its conduct.⁵

As Tully identifies a sense of time, an awareness of past and future as well as present, as the first effect of man's distinguishing reason, so Rasselas observes this sense differentiates him from the beasts of the earth. "I fear pain when I do not feel it," laments the prince; "I sometimes shrink at evils recollected, and sometimes start at

evils anticipated" (p. 611). Johnson, however, is not merely echoing one of his favorites classical writers; he is using the concept of man's uniqueness very differently from the way Cicero had used it, and somewhat differently from the way other contemporary writers were using it. A brief glance at an essay by one of those contemporaries, Oliver Goldsmith, will help to illustrate this point.

In Letter XLIV of The Citizen of the World (Fri., 6 June 1760), Goldsmith writes,

A remembrance of what is past, and an anticipation of what is to come, seem to be the two faculties by which man differs most from other animals. Though brutes enjoy them in a limited degree, yet their whole life seems taken up in the present, regardless of the past and the future. Man on the contrary, endeavors to derive his happiness, and experiences most of his miseries from these two sources.⁶

The overall point of the essay is that man should view life philosophically, or, as Goldsmith puts it, choose the life of a philosopher. Most striking is the essay's balance: just as man's temporal sense is a source of happiness and misery, so choosing the life of a philosopher, rather than that of a lover of pleasure or a man of business (the only other alternatives mentioned by Goldsmith), adds to man's happiness primarily by diminishing his misery. Goldsmith concludes, "Happy were we all born philosophers, all born, with a talent of thus dissipating our own cares, by spreading them upon all mankind!" (p. 190).

Now the differences among these three very similar passages can tell us a good deal about the meaning of the second chapter of Rasselas. Goldsmith, it seems to me, occupies an intermediate position between Cicero and Johnson. In Cicero no connection is made between man's temporal sense and any unhappiness in this world; on the contrary, the classical philosopher seems to exalt as ennobling this effect of man's reason. In Goldsmith the sense of time becomes a source of both secular happiness and secular misery; no tendency is evident to reason beyond this world. In Johnson, the emphasis is on the worldly discomfort caused by man's unique temporal faculty. To be sure, this discomfort is qualified by two remarks Rasselas makes in the midst of his complaint, remarks which function ambivalently in the apologue, being proved false in a secular sense but true in terms of a life after death: "Man has surely some latent sense for which this place [the happy valley? this world?] affords no gratification, or he has some desires distinct from sense which must be satisfied before he can be happy;" and to the animals Rasselas says, "nor do I, ye gentle beings, envy your felicity; for it is not the felicity of man. I have many distresses from which ye are free; . . . surely the equity of providence has ballanced peculiar sufferings with

peculiar enjoyments" (pp. 611-12). I view *Rasselas'* statements as an embryonic argument from desire; the same tendency that they show to move from the discontent of time-conscious man to an argument for immortality is also found, by the way, in a clear though undeveloped form at the beginning of Rambler 41, where the necessity of searching into the past and the future "for matter on which the attention may be employed" Johnson considers "a strong proof of the superior and celestial nature of the soul of man."⁷

To make another distinction among the selections from Cicero, Goldsmith, and Johnson, an unmistakable air of confidence pervades the passage from Cicero: man "easily sees the entire course of life and prepares beforehand the things necessary to its conduct." Goldsmith's essay is almost as secularly oriented: the choice of life is not so easily made, but the life of a philosopher tops the other two avenues considered, and for an interesting reason: "The great source of calamity lies in regret or anticipation: he, therefore, is most wise who thinks of the present alone, regardless of the past or the future. This is impossible to the man of pleasure; it is difficult to the man of business; and is in some measure attainable by the philosopher" (pp. 189-90). *Rasselas* is to learn,

after an even more extensive survey than Goldsmith's Citizen, that no choice of life will adequately fulfill his expectations and desires, that no choice of life will permit him to live mainly in the present, and that, partly for these reasons, the choice of life is less important than the choice of eternity.

That the second chapter of Rasselas initiates an implicit argument for man's immortality is further suggested by a parallel between it and a passage from William Wollaston's Religion of Nature Delineated. Near the conclusion of his discussion of immortality, Wollaston asks us to

Fancy a man walking in some retired field, far from noise, and free from prejudice, to debate this matter [the existence of a future state] with himself: and then judge, whether such meditations as these would not be just. "I think I may be sure, that neither lifeless matter, nor the vegetative tribe, that stone, that flower, that tree have any reflex thoughts: nor do the sensitive animals, that sheep, that ox, seem to have any such thing, or but in the lowest degree, and in respect of present objects only. . . . I can, not only represent to my self things, that are, or have been, but deduce many other from them, make excursions into futurity, and foresee much of what will be, or at least may be; by strict thinking I had almost said, get into another world beforehand: and, whether I shall live in some other state after death, or not, I am certainly a being capable of such an expectation, and cannot but be solicitous about it: none of which things can be said of these clods, or those brutes." (p. 209)

Compare the situation of Wollaston's hypothetical speculator with Johnson's Rasselas, "who, in the twenty-sixth year of his age, began to withdraw himself from . . . pastimes and assemblies, and to delight in solitary walks and silent meditation. . . . [He] spent day after day on the banks of rivulets sheltered with trees, where he sometimes listened to the birds in the branches, sometimes observed the fish playing in the stream, and anon cast his eyes upon the pastures and mountains filled with animals" (pp. 610-11). These observations lead the prince to the complaint we have examined above, a complaint remarkably similar to the one expressed in Wollaston's tract. In fact, the major difference between the two is that while Rasselas concludes declaratively that providence will balance his sufferings with comparable enjoyments, Wollaston's persona, coming to the same conclusion, expresses it via a series of rhetorical questions:

Can I then be designed for nothing further,
 than just to eat, drink, sleep, walk about,
 and act upon this earth; that is, to have
 no further being, than what these brutes
 have, so far beneath me? Can I be made
 capable of such great expectations, which
 those animals know nothing of (happier by
 far in this regard than I am, if we must
 die alike), only to be disappointed at last?
 . . . Have I been set so far above them in
 life, only to be levelled with them at death? (p. 209)

The remarkable similarity in situation and sentiment between Wollaston's solitary speculator and Johnson's main character suggests possibly a source for Rasselas in Wollaston, a possibility that would be further enhanced, by the way, had Johnson read Bolingbroke, who successfully imitates this part of Wollaston's tract with his own solitary meditation in a retired field (see V, 389-92). But I am not concerned here with establishing a source so much as a general context for the opening of Rasselas. To this end it is noteworthy that Edward Young, in the section of Night Thoughts which develops the argument from desire, sketches the same type of situation as Wollaston and Johnson, and to the same conclusion (see above, pp. 67-68, 72).

The opening of Rasselas, then, seems quite clearly to initiate an argument from desire for the immortality of man. Johnson conveys through Rasselas' own observations the belief that man is essentially different from brute and that a major reason for this difference lies in his temporal sense: this belief we have shown earlier to be a conspicuous part of the argument from desire in Gastrell and others. Moreover, the emphasis of the second chapter of Rasselas is on the nature of man, not the nature of God; to be sure, Rasselas speaks of "the equity of providence"

and certainly the world of the apologue is meant to lie within a moral universe. But the internal, psychological dilemma of man is Johnson's focus, as is witnessed by Rasselas' lament that he is "burthened with [himself]" (p. 611).⁸ The equity of providence is necessary for man's happiness even in the absence of moral injustice, Johnson seems to suggest, in order to satisfy the longings of man which will not be satisfied by a finite world, even by one of the best of possible worlds, the happy valley. Almost as if to test the validity of the argument from desire, Johnson initiates it in a land where "every desire was immediately granted" (p. 609) and successfully demonstrates the strength of the proof by portraying the insatiability of the human psyche.

Let us conclude our discussion of the opening of Rasselas with a look at the final paragraph of its second chapter, for it provides a good occasion to show how a serious reading is not incompatible with a recognition of the work's humorous elements. As the prince conducts his solitary meditation, he engages in a rather sentimental, self-approving joy. He utters his observations "with a plaintive voice, yet with a look that discovered him to feel some complacency in his own perspicacity, and to receive some solace of the miseries of life, from consciousness of the delicacy with which he felt, and the

eloquence with which he bewailed them" (p. 612). Doubtless Johnson undercuts his young philosopher here, especially when he suggests as a source of solace Rasselas' consciousness of the delicacy of his feelings, but does he undercut his philosophy? I think not. Here and throughout Rasselas, it seems to me, the meaning of the work inevitably transcends the understanding of its characters. That Johnson's characters see but through a glass darkly is no reason to discount the importance of the glimpses of truth that they get, and that they frequently fall back into mundane confusion does not mean that the work was created primarily to show their failings. In other words, Rasselas is neither secular comedy nor Augustan satire; when we treat it as an apologue, we are able to appreciate at once its ideational content (namely, the argument for man's immortality) and its humor (in this case, the partly ridiculous, partly admirable psychological resiliency of the prince).

3. THE CHOICE OF LIFE: "the various conditions of humanity"

Having established through the opening of Rasselas that man had desires which distinguish him from the rest of animal creation, Johnson's next task is to demonstrate that these desires are incapable of secular satisfaction, which he accomplishes for the most part by an extensive survey of the various conditions of humanity. Indeed, the middle section of Rasselas, from the escape from the happy valley in chapter XV to the visit to the pyramids in chapter XXXI and the subsequent abduction of Pekuah, is structured by this survey: epicurean, stoic, and natural philosophy, great and mean fortune, city and country life are all examined and found lacking in the essential ingredient for man's happiness. Even before this survey takes place the topic has been briefly suggested by Imlac's history (chapters VIII-XII), which, as many critics have noted, roughly parallels Rasselas' subsequent unsuccessful quest. And even before Imlac tells his life story, Johnson has hinted at the same type of survey in another way: we recall that Rasselas first meets Imlac after a flood has confined "all the princes to domestick amusements, and the attention of Rasselas was particularly seized by a poem, which Imlac rehearsed upon the various conditions of humanity. He

commanded the poet to attend him in his apartment, and recite his verses a second time" (p. 621). Imlac's poem (perhaps his "Vanity of Human Wishes"?) gives way to the poet's history which in turn gives way to the story of Rasselas' travels as widening circles about the same theme--the choice of life. After Pekuah's recovery Johnson returns to the theme in the vignettes of the mad astronomer and the old man. The overwhelming number of conditions surveyed by Rasselas, along with the complete freedom he has to choose whichever one should prove worthy, argues strongly that once again Johnson is testing the reasoning of the argument from desire within an extraordinarily strenuous situation; if happiness is to be found in any of the various conditions of this world, surely Rasselas and his companions should find it.

The first title Johnson gave The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia, was The Choice of Life, but this expression does not occur in the apologue until the twelfth chapter, where it calls attention to the twin misconceptions that Rasselas explodes, the fallacies of location and vocation. Punctuating both the beginning and the end of the chapter, the phrase appears first in Rasselas' response to perhaps the most frequently quoted sentence in the work: "Human life," says Imlac, "is every where a state in which much is to be endured, and little to be

enjoyed." The prince replies, "I am not yet willing . . . to suppose that happiness is so parsimoniously distributed to mortals; nor can believe but that, if I had the choice of life, I should be able to fill every day with pleasure" (p. 632). Then, Imlac completes the autobiography he has been relating at the prince's request, Rasselas asks him to be his companion in his flight from the happy valley and his "sole director in the choice of life," and Imlac attempts to discourage the prince from his scheme. Rasselas responds, "Do not seek to deter me from my purpose I am impatient to see what thou hast seen; and, since thou art thyself weary of the valley, it is evident, that thy former state was better than this. . . . I am resolved to judge with my own eyes of the various conditions of men, and then to make deliberately my choice of life" (p. 635). That Imlac is weary of the valley does not prove, of course, that his former state was better; but more is called into question here than Rasselas' dubious logic. All of Rasselas to some extent and certainly the first third of the work is concerned to demonstrate the locative fallacy. When Johnson shows us the discontented prince in the happy valley and follows this with the self-told saga of a world-weary sage even wearier of an Edenic escape from

the world, surely he intends to show that the site of man's unhappiness is within man himself. The lesson thus driven home early to the reader if not to the prince, the rest of Rasselas occasionally touches on the fallacy of location--recall the unhappiness the travellers find in Cairo, where everyone seems happy, and the discontent of the shepherds and the hermit away from urban life--but is more concerned with the other of the matching errors, the fallacy of vocation.

The shift in emphasis I am suggesting is reinforced by the two sections of the apologue which deal overtly with religious institutions, the "hint on pilgrimage" (chapter XI) and the discussion of monastic life (chapter XLVII). In the earlier passage Johnson grants that certain places definitely affect men's emotions: "that some places may operate upon our own minds in an uncommon manner, is an opinion which hourly experience will justify." Yet his balanced argument about the value of religious pilgrimage stops well short of any implication that change of place for the sake of worship is a necessary component of piety: "Long journies in search of truth are not commanded. Truth, such as is necessary to the regulation of life, is always found where it is honestly sought. Change of place is no natural cause of the increase of piety, for it inevitably produces dissipation of mind" (p. 631).

Religious vocation replaces religious location when, much later, the lives of the monks of St. Anthony are discussed. Johnson then admits the value of monastic retreat as a preparation for the afterlife but refuses to permit the reader to believe that this vocation is, in terms of earthly or heavenly happiness, intrinsically any better than others. To Nekayah's question, "Do you think . . . that the monastick rule is a more holy and less imperfect state than any other?" Imlac replies, "He that lives well in the world is better than he that lives well in a monastery. But, perhaps, every one is not able to stem the temptations of publick life; and, if he cannot conquer, he may properly retreat" (p. 703). Even in a religious context, then, no place or style of life provides a panacea for man's ills.

Rasselas' resolution to examine with his own eyes the various conditions of men implies the view of vocation he soon makes evident: "whatever be the general infelicity of man, one condition is more happy than another, and wisdom surely directs us to take the least evil in the choice of life" (p. 642). That Johnson employs in the phrase the choice of life a classical topos, the vitarum electio, has been noted before,⁹ but the way he modifies the topos so as to make fallacious Rasselas' assumption that one condition is more happy than another has not

been pointed out. Cicero's De Officiis provides once again an early and well-known version of the topos. Cicero considers the decision of what kind of man we want to be and what sort of life we want to lead the most difficult of all. "For it is at the beginning of young manhood, when the ability to plan is weakest, that each man chooses the kind of life he will lead, and he chooses the kind that he finds most alluring. As a result he is caught up in a certain pattern and course of living even before he can judge what is best." Next Cicero recalls the familiar picture of Hercules deciding between two paths, one of pleasure, the other of virtue. "It was perhaps possible that such a choice could fall to the lot of Hercules . . . but the same kind of choice is not ours." The influence of parents, peers, and the public shape our choice, Cicero tells us, making the stark decision of Hercules unavailable to us. Yet, "there is one extremely rare class of men, those who have had the opportunity to consider what course of life they most wish to follow, either because of an unusual degree of intelligence, or because of a splendid education in philosophy, or because they possess both these advantages" (I, 117-19).

Much of this has its analogue in Rasselas: besides the general similarity provided by the youthful Rasselas

making, or trying to make, the difficult choice of life, there is a specific statement by Imlac which echoes a Ciceronian idea: "Very few, said the poet, live by choice. Every man is placed in his present condition by causes which acted without his foresight, and with which he did not always willingly cooperate; and therefore you will rarely meet one who does not think the lot of his neighbour better than his own."¹⁰ Even Rasselas' immediate reply shows a similar echo: "I am pleased to think . . . that my birth has given me at least one advantage over others, by enabling me to determine for myself. I have here the world before me; I will review it at leisure: surely happiness is somewhere to be found" (p. 643).

If the vitae electio in Cicero and Johnson shows these similarities, how does Johnson modify the topos better to suit his purposes in Rasselas? De Officiis is a book of practical morality, and when Cicero regards the choice of Hercules as usually inapplicable to most men, he does so not because it is a moral but rather a simple choice. Johnson, on the other hand, uses the vitae electio in a distinctly amoral way. Despite frequent mention of the good and evil of life in general and of the evils of particular conditions of life, Rasselas

is not primarily concerned with morality in a narrow sense and Prince Rasselas' choice of life is not a moral one. Johnson does treat a moral question in Rasselas, the influence of virtue on happiness; this question, as we have seen, was very important in the moral argument for immortality and Johnson's position on it is strictly orthodox (see below, pp. 114-16). But the burden of Rasselas is to show that even characters who are wonderfully moral find secular happiness ephemeral. Various conditions of life are examined and rejected by the travellers from Abissinia, not because those conditions are immoral and therefore unproductive of happiness, but simply because, regardless of their morality, they fail to satisfy man's quest for happiness: the philosophy of the stoic sage does not provide a satisfactory choice of life, but there is nothing vicious in the stoic's failure to see that the restraint of passion he preaches is impossible for man to maintain; the philosopher of nature is satirized, to be sure, but for his foolish doctrine and even more foolish self-approving complacency rather than for immorality; even the life of the youthful hedonists is rejected not because of its vague immoralities-- "their pleasures were gross and sensual, in which the mind had no part; their conduct was at once wild and mean"-- but because it fails to satisfy man's search for a still

point in this world of flux: thus Rasselas "thought it unsuitable to a reasonable being to act without a plan, and to be sad or chearful only by chance. 'Happiness, said he, must be something solid and permanent, without fear and without uncertainty'" (p. 643). The same point could be made about each of the numerous conditions of humanity examined and rejected by Rasselas and his company.

So Johnson did not employ the vitarum electio in Rasselas in a moral way. Recognizing what he did not do is important in this case, I think, for two reasons. First, that he passes up an obvious opportunity to contrast various secular professions with a general religious calling is noteworthy.¹¹ A contemporary, the pseudonymous Philanthropos, in An Essay on the Existence of God, and the Immortality of the Soul (1750), takes off from the position common to Cicero and Johnson:

No sooner are mankind arrived at an age to distinguish what they are, but they immediately chuse for themselves some profession of life or other, according as necessity or their own inclination leads them. The causes of their inclinations are very different, and too often grounded upon little or no reason; and this is what makes that strange and mean medley of professions that we see in the world for that which attaches us rather to one kind of life than to another, is, for the most part, such a trifle, that we should be confounded and ashamed of our levity, were we but rightly to consider it.¹²

Philanthropos, however, unlike Johnson makes the natural Christian transition from profession to calling: "But besides these various professions . . . there is a common profession, a general calling, that all mankind are obliged to embrace, which is that of being men, and of living as such. . . . One may say in general, that all the duties of man consist in living and dying as we ought to do" (pp. 16-17). In Rasselas Johnson does not stress the importance of leading a moral life, of obeying one's Christian calling, though the concept had been familiar to him from an early age through the writings of William Law,¹³ and though it predominates in his Prayers and Meditations. What he does not do leads us to what he does do, that is, move via the unsatisfactory nature of any and all choices of life to a proof of a life after this one.

Nowhere is the "structure of accumulation" W. K. Wimsatt has noted in Rasselas¹⁴ more apparent than in the manner in which not only each individual failure on Rasselas' part to discover a satisfactory choice of life but also the total effect of such repeated failures conveys support to the argument from desire. The inability of any choice of life to sate man's appetite is suggested not merely because one profession, or two, or three, proves

unsatisfactory, but more because, even though each one examined proves so, Rasselas and his friends, nevertheless, continue their search. "The Happiness of Solitude: The Hermit's History" (chapter XXI) particularly emphasizes this. Seeking whether a life away from society will provide the happiness they hunt, the travellers visit a hermit who has spent the last fifteen years of his life in isolation. In answer to their inquiries the hermit admits that his retreat at first brought him happiness but soon became tasteless and irksome. He tells them, "I have been long comparing the evils with the advantages of society, and resolve to return into the world to morrow" (p. 651). In a journey which suggests the co-incidence of the hermit's behavior with most of mankind's, he returns to Cairo in the company of the Abissinians. Later, Rasselas brings up his case at "an assembly of learned men, who met at stated times to unbend their minds, and compare their opinions" (p. 651). After a variety of views has been expressed,

One, who appeared more affected with the narrative than the rest, thought it likely, that the hermit would, in a few years, go back to his retreat, and, perhaps, if shame did not restrain, or death intercept him, return once more from his retreat into the world: "For the hope of happiness, said he, is so strongly impressed, that the longest

experience is not able to efface it. Of the present state, whatever it be, we feel, and are forced to confess, the misery, yet, when the same state is again at a distance, imagination paints it as desirable." (p. 652)

Later in the apologue, Imlac, using the story of the hermit as an exemplum to discourage Nekayah from retreating from society to lament the loss of her maid Pekuah, suggests that she too will find no satisfaction by shifting her location: "Remember the confession of the pious hermit. You will wish to return into the world, when the image of your companion has left your thoughts" (p. 677). The hermit's behavior, then, underlined by Johnson both by the discussion of it in the assembly of learned men and by Imlac's subsequent allusion, is a dramatic rendition of the idea we have seen advanced by Henry Grove and Francis Gastrell in the course of their arguments from desire that the psychological attributes of man condemn him to perpetual discontent in this world, a discontent reflected in his constantly shifting from one posture to another and back again. As we shall see later, Johnson does not finish with this idea until he has finished with Rasselas, where in a perfect conclusion to the apologue the choice of life gives way intellectually to a choice of eternity while the infinite desires of the travellers continue unabated in this life, a constant reminder of an eternal existence.

4. EVIL IN RASSELAS: "the fruits of autumn . . . the flowers of the spring"

Curiously, the only discussion of evil in Rasselas appeared just recently. In a short essay George Brinton argues that Rasselas consistently rejects the facile theodicy of Soame Jenyns' Free Enquiry and that in the apologue "the question of the origin of evil is raised, but it is necessarily left unanswered."¹⁵ Brinton's approach, regarding Rasselas as an unsuccessful theodicy, does justice neither to it nor to the intellectual ability of its author: I find no evidence that Johnson was effected by what Brinton calls "the paradox that evil may drive man toward belief and at the same time call into question the grounds of that belief" (p. 96). Moreover, for Rasselas not why evil exists but what types of evil exist is the important question. The following discussion, then, concerns the depiction rather than the problem of evil in Rasselas.

There is no sin in Rasselas. The work assumes a Christian world-view, argues a specifically Christian point, and abounds in allusions to good and evil in the world, but it does not depict to any appreciable degree moral evil. In fact, if we examine Rasselas in terms of the traditional divisions of moral, physical, and metaphysical

evil, we find that, first, Johnson deliberately distinguishes between moral and the other kinds of evil; second, he twice advances orthodox defences for the presence of evil in the lives of virtuous men; and, most importantly, he creates in Rasselas a world dominated by physical and especially metaphysical evil, thus lending credence to my contention that the argument from desire is the basic argument advanced for immortality in Rasselas.¹⁶

The abduction of Pekuah is the prime example in Rasselas of physical evil, an evil which affects a nature either corporeally or spiritually: mental pain or sorrow falls into this category just as much as physical pain or affliction. Johnson seems especially concerned during his depiction of Princess Nekayah's sorrow over the loss of her favorite to show that this feeling is indeed a very real evil and, at the same time, not related to moral evil, that is, a disorder of the will from the free choice of a sinful act. Let us review the circumstances of Pekuah's abduction.

At the suggestion of Imlac, the four from Abissinia visit the pyramids, but just as they are about to enter an interior apartment, Pekuah, the princess' maid, draws back, afraid to "enter a place which must surely be inhabited by unquieted souls." Unconvinced by Imlac's

arguments that such spirits are no more likely to haunt the pyramid than other places and that they should have neither the power nor the will to harm innocent visitors, Pekuah persists in her fears and remarks to her mistress, "If the princess is pleased that her servant should die . . . let her command some death less dreadful than enclosure in this horrid cavern. You know I dare not disobey you: I must go if you command me; but, if I once enter, I never shall come back" (p. 670). The princess relents, Pekuah is left behind, but when the group returns from their exploration they discover that Pekuah has been kidnapped by a troop of nomadic Arabs. When months pass and Pekuah is not recovered, Nekayah grows more and more remorseful, until finally she begins to assume guilt that is not properly hers:

A thousand times she reproached herself with the easy compliance by which she permitted her favourite to stay behind her. "Had not my fondness, said she, lessened my authority, Pekuah had not dared to talk of her terrors. She ought to have feared me more than spectres. A severe look would have overpowered her; a peremptory command would have compelled obedience. Why did foolish indulgence prevail upon me? Why did I not speak and refuse to hear?" (p. 674)

Imlac responds to the princess' self-reproach in a passage so significant that I shall quote it at length:

Great princess . . . do not reproach yourself for your virtue, or consider that as blameable by which evil has accidentally been caused. Your tenderness for the timidity of Pekuah was generous and kind. When we act according to our duty, we commit the event to him by whose laws our actions are governed, and who will suffer none to be finally punished for obedience. When, in prospect of some good, whether natural or moral, we break the rules prescribed us, we withdraw from the direction of superior wisdom, and take all consequences upon ourselves. Man cannot so far know the connexion of causes and events, as that he may venture to do wrong in order to do right. When we pursue our end by lawful means, we may always console our miscarriage by the hope of future recompense. When we consult only our own policy, and attempt to find a nearer way to good, by overleaping the settled boundaries of right and wrong, we cannot be happy even by success, because we cannot escape the consciousness of our fault; but, if we miscarry, the disappointment is irremediably embittered. How comfortless is the sorrow of him, who feels at once the pangs of guilt, and the vexation of calamity which guilt has brought upon him? (pp. 674-75)

Here Johnson is making two very important, and closely related, points. First, he is distinguishing between physical evil--the abduction of Pekuah and the consequential sorrow Nekayah feels--and moral evil--the result of some wilfully sinful act of which Nekayah erroneously thinks herself guilty. Secondly, Johnson suggests that physical evil afflicts the virtuous as well as the vicious in this life, and that while there is some limited reward for virtuous conduct ("no unlucky consequence

can oblige us to repent it," p. 675), complete reward awaits us in another life. This second point is reinforced later when Pekuah narrates the first conversation she had with her Arab captor. Recognizing the innocence of his prisoner, the Arab remarks, "The violence of war admits no distinction; the lance that is lifted at guilt and power will sometimes fall on innocence and gentleness. . . . the angels of affliction spread their toils alike for the virtuous and the wicked, for the mighty and the mean" (p. 682).

A distinction between two kinds of evil and an orthodox statement that virtue is not always rewarded in this world, the two points which highlight the conversation between Imlac and Nekayah that we have just considered, occur earlier in Rasselas in the "Disquisition upon Greatness" (chapter XXVII) involving the princess and her brother. According to Rasselas, a benevolent ruler who did not over-extend his power could govern virtuously and happily. His sister responds,

Whether perfect happiness would be procured by perfect goodness . . . this world will never afford an opportunity of deciding. But this, at least, may be maintained, that we do not always find visible happiness in proportion to visible virtue. All natural and almost all political evils, are incident alike to the

bad and good: they are confounded in the misery of a famine, and not much distinguished in the fury of a faction; they sink together in a tempest, and are driven together from their country by invaders. All that virtue can afford is quietness of conscience, a steady prospect of a happier state; this may enable us to endure calamity with patience; but remember that patience must suppose pain. (p. 661)

Once again, this time through Nekayah, Johnson suggests the limited reward that virtue finds in this world and the seemingly capricious nature of physical evil. Rasselas' answer to his sister, I would argue, draws a distinction between physical evil and what is now called metaphysical evil:

Dear princess . . . you fall into the common errors of exaggeratory declamation, by producing, in a familiar disquisition, examples of national calamities, and scenes of extensive misery, which are found in books rather than in the world, and which, as they are horrid, are ordained to be rare. . . .

On necessary and inevitable evils, which overwhelm kingdoms at once, all disputation is vain: when they happen they must be endured. But it is evident, that these bursts of universal distress are more dreaded than felt: thousands and ten thousands flourish in youth, and wither in age, without the knowledge of any other than domestick evils, and share the same pleasures and vexations whether their kings are mild or cruel, whether the armies of their country pursue their enemies, or retreat before them. (pp. 661-62)

Much of the import of Rasselas' speech derives from Johnson's belief that we are all perpetual moralists and that problems

of everyday life, therefore, provide fertile ground for philosophical inquiry, making up in universal applicability what they lack in dramatic urgency. Still I think it is worthwhile to note the difference between the cataclysmic evils which Nekayah mentions (she calls them "natural" and "political" evils) and the "domestick evils" Rasselas is concerned about: the former, striking a few people infrequently and capriciously, fit the definition of physical evil just as the abduction of Pekuah does, while the latter, with seemingly universal yet still undeserved effect, fall within the bounds of metaphysical evil, a kind of evil resulting from the mere finitude of created beings. That Johnson's primary regard in Rasselas is to urge a belief in man's immortality by pointing to the existence of inevitable metaphysical evil becomes clear in the passages that immediately follow Rasselas' admonition of his sister and that resume a discussion of the merits of marriage.¹⁷

Prior to the discussion about kinds of evil, Nekayah had been describing the familial discord she had discovered in her survey of everyday life; she had concluded that "Domestick discord . . . is not inevitably and fatally necessary; but yet it is not easily avoided." Rasselas had responded, "If such be the general effect of marriage

. . . I shall, for the future, think it dangerous to connect my interest with that of another, lest I should be unhappy by my partner's fault." Nekayah quickly pointed out that this preventative was worse than the disease.

Those who live single,

as the out-laws of human nature, make it their business and their pleasure to disturb that society which debars them from its privileges. To live without feeling or exciting sympathy, to be fortunate without adding to the felicity of others, or afflicted without tasting the balm of pity, is a state more gloomy than solitude: it is not retreat but exclusion from mankind. Marriage has many pains, but celibacy has no pleasures. (pp. 658-59)

At this point the discussion is interrupted and when it is resumed, the prince and princess seem to have switched sides. Rasselas argues that "Marriage is evidently the dictate of nature; men and women were made to be companions of each other, and therefore [he] cannot be persuaded but that marriage is one of the means of happiness"; that "The world must be peopled by marriage, or peopled without it"; and that "the incommunities of a single life are, in a great measure, necessary and certain, but those of the conjugal state accidental and avoidable." Nekayah counters that "marriage is rather permitted than approved" and that how the world is to be peopled is not their concern (pp. 662-64).

In their dispute Rasselas and Nekayah do not forget upon what question they began, like the assembly of learned men Rasselas had visited earlier, but they do seem to forget which side of the question they originally favored. Rasselas, in fact, reminds Nekayah of this at one point: "You seem to forget . . . that you have, even now, represented celibacy as less happy than marriage. Both conditions may be bad, but they cannot both be worst." The princess' response stresses that the limitations of the human mind rather than intellectual dishonesty have produced the contradiction:

I did not expect . . . to hear that imputed to falshood which is the consequence only of frailty. To the mind, as to the eye, it is difficult to compare with exactness objects vast in their extent, and various in their parts. . . . of two systems, of which neither can be surveyed by any human being in its full compass of magnitude and multiplicity of complication, where is the wonder, that judging of the whole by parts, I am alternately affected by one and the other as either presses on my memory or fancy?" (p. 663)

Finally, after the various evils of early, late, and no marriages at all have been discussed, Nekayah concludes, "Every hour . . . confirms my prejudice in favour of the position so often uttered by the mouth of Imlac, 'That nature sets her gifts on the right hand and on the left.' Those conditions, which flatter hope and attract desire, are so constituted, that, as we approach one, we recede

from another. There are goods so opposed that we cannot seize both, but, by too much prudence, may pass between them at too great a distance to reach either" (p. 666). Here, then, in a discussion of the choice of marriage is a synecdoche for the choice of life.¹⁸ Apart from moral and physical evil, lies a source of man's problems in the unavoidable discrepancy between his all-encompassing desires and limited means. Even to choose between two goods is to acknowledge the metaphysical evil inherent in the loss of one of those goods. A man must do something, so a choice must be made, but the choice of marriage like the choice of life implies the incurrence of metaphysical evil at the very least. Rasselas is not Hamlet choosing between two evils (or so it frequently seems to him), nor is he Bunyan's Pilgrim choosing between good and evil but fallen so that to know the good is not necessarily to choose the good. Both dilemmas undoubtedly were important to Johnson, but in Rasselas a third dilemma, the choice between two goods, is far more important, for it helps Johnson demonstrate the nonperfectibility of man's secular life and this nonperfectibility in turn demands that a Christian look for happiness to a life after death.

Johnson ends this chapter and his discussion of marriage beautifully, by having Nekayah reiterate one of his

favorite beliefs: the necessity of action.

he does nothing who endeavours to do more than is allowed to humanity. Flatter not yourself with contrarieties of pleasure. Of the blessings set before you make your choice, and be content. No man can taste the fruits of autumn while he is delighting his scent with the flowers of the spring: no man can, at the same time, fill his cup from the source and from the mouth of the Nile. (pp. 666-67)

Faced with choosing between the fruits of autumn and the flowers of the spring, man must not allow the dilemma to paralyze him, Johnson insists. Doing something is always preferable to doing nothing, and making a choice temporarily fills the vacuity of life, making it once more enjoyable until the novelty of the choice wears off and man is forced to choose again. Johnson leads us to immortality, then, but along the way he tells us how to live.¹⁹

Johnson's treatment of evil in Rasselas leads us to several conclusions. First, nowhere in the work is there any suggestion that its author was influenced at all by the attacks on the moral argument and by the parallel movements toward moral relativism that we examined in chapter two; we have seen him maintain the strictly orthodox position that the evils of life are not always co-incident with moral evils, or, as he states elsewhere, "We are not to consider those on whom evil falls, as the outcasts of

providence; for . . . under the dispensation of the gospel we are no where taught, that the good shall have any exemption from the common accidents of life, or that natural and civil evil shall not be equally shared by the righteous and the wicked."²⁰ On the other hand, the moral argument does not play a particularly prominent role in advancing the apologue's meaning; Johnson leans much more heavily on the argument from desire and emphasizes metaphysical evil, one of its logical bases. In the previous chapter I suggested two main distinctions between the moral argument and the argument from desire. One of those can now be profitably restated in terms of the kind of evil dominant in Rasselas. While the moral argument requires the depiction of moral evil to be most effective, the argument from desire functions best when predicated on metaphysical evil. No stronger argument for man's immortality was available to Johnson than one based on the universally recognized finitude of man and the almost equally universal belief, demonstrated in Rasselas, that his desires were infinite. With the latter having been highlighted throughout the opening thirty chapters, Johnson not surprisingly stresses man's finitude in the concluding third of his work, as I shall now demonstrate.

5. MEMENTO MORI: "this is the last"

No part of Rasselas has been less understood than its two concluding chapters. Joseph Wood Krutch believes that in introducing the concept of "choice of eternity" in chapter XLVIII Johnson "pays to orthodoxy, as he always does, the tribute of formal profession. But these formal professions . . . constitute only the formal rather than the effective moral" (p. 183). The effective moral, according to Krutch, is Voltaire's: to cultivate one's garden. W. K. Wimsatt seems to accept Krutch's view when he maintains that the theological solemnity of the penultimate chapter "is an exceptional moment, not the ground tone of the book and not its conclusion. The conclusion, in which nothing is concluded, reverts to the basic plan" (p. 130).²¹ Emrys Jones offers an aesthetic solution, albeit closer to modern than eighteenth-century aesthetics: "The book . . . contrives to be both a closed and an open system; the demands of literary form and the demands of life are both met." The concluding chapter, Jones believes, may be interpreted as Nature making a critique of Art. "Nature exposes the insufficiency of Art by calling in question the very form of the work of art itself--by suggesting that an ending is not possible because there are no endings in nature. The flow of life cannot be

checked; life refuses to be contained within a neat literary form."²² Johnson, it seems to me, had nothing if not a sense of ending, both in art and in life. And the penultimate chapter of Rasselas seems to me not only as sincere but also as relevant to the rest of the work as the "Conclusion in which Nothing is Concluded." That the final two chapters of Rasselas complement rather than oppose each other, that the theological solemnity of the next-to-last chapter is not exceptional but of a piece with what has preceded it, and that the culmination of Rasselas is a successful conclusion to the argument for immortality which has informed the work will become clear through an examination of the theme which dominates its final third, the traditional Christian memento mori.²³ This concept is meaningless, of course, without a concomitant belief in personal immortality; moreover, as we trace it through the apologue, we shall find more and more explicit statements about the existence of a life after death, statements which climax in the visit to the catacombs and the discussion of the nature of the soul which occurs there.

The appearance of the memento mori theme in chapters XXXI-XLVIII is neither abrupt nor unexpected; on the contrary, Johnson has carefully prepared us for it, partly by the way the theme follows the vanity of human wishes concept

in the logic of the argument from desire,²⁴ and partly by his explicit use of the theme in previous sections of the work.²⁵ It is well, then, to preface our discussion of the final third of Rasselas with a look at three precursory appearances of the eschatological theme.

After Rasselas has left the happy valley, the first style of life he tries is that of the youthful hedonists; he soon grows weary of their superficial pleasures, however, and remonstrates his new friends with these words:

we have mistaken our own interest. The first years of man must make provision for the last Let us consider that youth is of no long duration, and that in maturer age, when the enchantments of fancy shall cease, and phantoms of delight dance no more about us, we shall have no comforts but the esteem of wise men, and the means of doing good. . . . let us live as men who are sometime to grow old. (p. 644)

That youth should regulate its conduct with an awareness of old age is, of course, a concept far from original with Johnson. Long ago G. B. Hill noted that in this passage the author was preaching on the text, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them."²⁶ In a charity sermon written to be delivered at the resort of Bath, Johnson treats the same topic, urging that the "votaries of pleasure" who feel themselves unsatisfied and deluded

"spare something for the purchase of solid satisfaction . . . by the distribution of which they may lay up some treasures of happiness against that day which is stealing upon them, the day of age, of sickness, and of death, in which they shall be able to reflect with pleasure on no other part of their time past here, but that which was spent in the duties of charity."²⁷ Rasselas is not a sermon but in this case its argument is the same.

In the vignette of the stoic philosopher who would govern his passions with the constant light of reason Johnson develops more directly the theme of the mortality of man. Despite Imlac's warning that teachers of morality may discourse like angels but live like men, Rasselas returns from one visit with the philosopher entirely convinced that a life of "invulnerable patience" is the only source of true happiness. But the prince's next visit finds the stoic at the mercy of the very human passions he attempted to deny. His sorrow over his daughter's death causes him to tell Rasselas, "you are come at a time when all human friendship is useless; what I suffer cannot be remedied, what I have lost cannot be supplied. . . . My views, my purposes, my hopes are at an end." Rasselas then attempts to comfort the grieving father: "Sir, said the prince, mortality is an event by which a wise man

can never be surprised: we know that death is always near, and it should therefore always be expected," to which the philosopher replies, "What comfort . . . can truth and reason afford me? of what effect are they now, but to tell me, that my daughter will not be restored?" (p. 646). Of course, the primary effect of this scene is to deflate the stoic's prideful assertions of human self-sufficiency, but the episode also enforces Johnson's views on man's attitudes toward mortality and on man's need of the Christian belief in an afterlife to cope with death. He knew very well that it is human nature to ignore mortality,²⁸ and that in the face of death, when it can no longer be ignored, truth, reason, and human friendship are all inadequate solaces. In another, well-known refutation of stoic philosophy written almost simultaneously with Rasselas Johnson argues,

Real alleviation of the loss of friends, and rational tranquillity, in the prospect of our own dissolution can be received only from the promises of Him in whose hands are life and death, and from the assurance of another and better state, in which all tears will be wiped from the eyes, and the whole soul shall be filled with joy. Philosophy may infuse stubbornness, but Religion only can give patience.²⁹

Johnson's mind (and we can assume the minds of most of his audience) moved almost automatically from a contemplation of the sorrows of death to the consolations of the

Christian doctrine of personal immortality, with its promise to fill with joy the dread vacuity the soul experiences in this life.³⁰ Surely we should regard the presentation of the inconsolable sorrow of the stoic philosopher, then, as an oblique demonstration of the necessity of a belief in Christianity in general and immortality in particular.

Johnson's discussion of "The Happiness of a Life Led according to Nature" is a third rendering of the eschatological theme. Rasselas introduces to an assembly of learned men the subject of the style of life of the hermit who has returned to society with him and his companions. No consensus is reached about the worth of the hermit's life and the correctness of his decision. Finally, one "who appeared more affected with the narrative than the rest" predicts that most probably the hermit will again go into seclusion and later return to the outside world and concludes, "But the time will surely come, when desire will be no longer our torment, and no man shall be wretched but by his own fault" (p. 652).

Immediately, the philosopher of nature replies, "This . . . is the present condition of a wise man. The time is already come, when none are wretched but by their own fault." He then gives his formula for felicity:

to live according to nature, in obedience to that universal and unalterable law with which every heart is originally impressed [Let men] observe the hind of the forest, and the linnet of the grove: let them consider the life of animals, whose motions are regulated by instinct; they obey their guide and are happy. Let us therefore, at length, cease to dispute, and learn to live.

When further explanation proves merely the same sentiments couched in different words, Rasselas is convinced that "this was one of the sages whom he should understand less as he heard him longer" (pp. 652-53). Critics, quick to point out the rather obvious satire on Rousseau's naturalism, have ignored another equally important function of the passage.³¹ The one "more affected" than the rest, who expresses Johnsonian sentiments more directly perhaps than anyone else in the work, ends his astute observations on the present state of human existence with a definite reference to the Christian concept of life after death. In the afterlife no one will be wretched except by his own fault, there man's desires will be satisfied at last. When the natural philosopher objects to this point and maintains that the present life can be a state of permanent felicity, not only is he talking nonsense, but also he is guilty of a heretical denial of the necessity of the final dispensations of providence through an afterlife.

The three episodes dealing with Johnson's Christian view of death and afterlife which I have just discussed are harbingers of the controlling impulse of the final third of Rasselas. With the visit to the pyramids and the abduction of Pekuah the theme, following the logic of the argument from desire, changes gradually from the vanity of human wishes to the memento mori, a change marked both on the narrative and on the ideational level of the work. Pekuah's and the mad astronomer's stories compose most of the final section, which breaks from the previous narrative pattern of testing and rejecting various modes of life. Certainly by meeting the astronomer and the old man the travellers learn that neither solitary scholarship nor age provides a panacea for the ills of life, but both cases serve as well, and more importantly, to point out the mental and physical instability of man. And two emblems of man's mortality, the pyramids and the catacombs, significantly designate the beginning and the ending of the section.³² By examining the final part of Rasselas in its narrative sequence, I shall show that the scene at the catacombs provides the effective as well as the formal moral of the narrative and that the final chapter is not antithetical to but perfectly consistent with the orthodox profession which precedes it.

The abduction of Pekuah is a type of "little death" by which Johnson manages to demonstrate, largely through the use of irony, the vicissitudes of life, the inaccuracy of human expectation, and the transcendence of human sorrow. Consider first the site of the kidnapping. The pyramids are monuments not only to the dead but also to the insufficiency of human enjoyments, as Johnson makes plain by Imlac's words: "Whoever thou art, that, not content with a moderate condition, imaginest happiness in royal magnificence, and drestest that command or riches can feed the appetite of novelty with perpetual gratifications, survey the pyramids, and confess thy folly!" (p. 672). "Erected only in compliance with that hunger of imagination which preys incessantly upon life, and must be always appeased by some employment" but serving as funeral vaults as well (p. 671), the pyramids represent simultaneously the vanity of human wishes and the memento mori and thus provide a symbolic synthesis of the two logical components of the argument from desire.

The circumstances of the abduction of Pekuah that takes place amidst this setting have been outlined above; here I should like to concentrate on the role the episode plays in the advancement of the memento mori theme. After the kidnapping the grief-stricken Nekayah takes no more

comfort from her other attendants than the stoic philosopher did from Rasselas when they tell her that "lady Pekuah had enjoyed much happiness in the world for a long time, and might reasonably expect a change of fortune" (p. 673). In fact, it is the unexpectedness of the event--like the death of the stoic's daughter--which more than anything else Johnson stresses. The princess is "overpowered with surprise and grief" when told the news; Imlac speaks of the abduction as an evil "accidentally" caused; Pekuah herself says, "The suddenness of the event struck me with surprise," and "How little . . . did I expect that yesterday [this violence] should have fallen upon me" (pp. 672, 674, 680, 682). The episode conveys at once the precariousness of human existence and the tendency of people to look for stability in a world of flux. That Pekuah's gold makes her the master of the Arabs while Nekayah is mourning her probable death (p. 683) casts an even more ironic light on the unreliability of human expectations.

A passage from one of Johnson's sermons is applicable here, for it not only gives further evidence of his natural train of thought from the ills of this world to a world hereafter but also describes precisely the effect Pekuah's disappearance has on Nekayah:

The immediate effect of the numerous calamities with which human nature is threatened, or afflicted, is to direct our desires to a better state. . . . when those who love us fall daily into the grave, and we see ourselves considered as aliens and strangers by the rising generation; it seems that we must by necessity turn our thoughts to another life, where, to those who are well prepared for their departure, there will no longer be pain or sorrow.³³

"I am resolved," Nekayah tells Imlac, "to retire from the world with all its flatteries and deceits, and will hide myself in solitude. . . . till, with a mind purified from all earthly desires, I shall enter into that state, to which all are hastening, and in which I hope again to enjoy the friendship of Pekuah" (p. 676). Nekayah is, of course, overreacting, as she did earlier when she blamed herself excessively for the loss of Pekuah; moreover, Johnson seems to believe that most men are constitutionally incapable of such complete contemptus mundi as Nekayah proposes, even if it were to offer any better alternative to life than the other choices.

Just as Imlac previously assuaged the princess' guilt, he now dissuades her from withdrawing from the world, for he realizes that her grief will pass, despite its sincerity, and when it does, the solitude she now yearns for will be odious. The princess argues that her sorrow will never diminish, yet, as time goes by,

she begins imperceptibly to return to common cares and common pleasures, finally releasing herself completely from the self-imposed affliction of a daily period of meditation "on the merits and fondness of Pekuah" (p. 678). To interpret this as a satire on Nekayah's lack of true feeling for her friend would be wrong. In "The Progress of Sorrow" Johnson may indeed be ridiculing the sentimental school by showing that no one ever dies of a broken heart, but he is also presenting a very realistic, if somewhat ornamented, assessment of the transience of men's sorrow, much in the way Swift does in "Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift." Nekayah's mourning, like Poor Pope's, is not to be mocked because it, like all human emotions, is fleeting.

The vignettes of the astronomer and the old man continue the emphasis on the instability of life and the omnipresence of death that dominates the conclusion of Rasselas. That the astronomer believes he can control the weather and the seasons Imlac learns because the astronomer has chosen him as his successor. He tells the poet that he must soon quit his office "at the call of nature," that "the life of man is short, the infirmities of age increase upon [him], and the time will soon come when the regulator of the year must mingle with the dust" (pp. 690, 692). This portrait of one who considers himself the regulator of the year acknowledging that he must submit to time but not

seeing the contradiction inherent in his position is more pathetic than it is comic, as Imlac points out when Pekuah and Nekayah laugh at the astronomer's plight: "Ladies, . . . to mock the heaviest of human afflictions is neither charitable nor wise. Few can attain this man's knowledge, and few practise his virtues; but all may suffer his calamity. Of the uncertainties of our present state, the most dreadful and alarming is the uncertain continuance of reason" (p. 693). Madness, the apex of mental mutability, reminds us that in a world of flux not physical objects alone are subject to decay.³⁴

Immediately after Imlac's account of the astronomer's malady, as the travelling companions "walked along the bank of the Nile, delighted with the beams of the moon quivering on the water, they saw at a small distance an old man, whom the prince had often heard in the assembly of the sages." Upon questioning, the sage discourages any hope that the latter part of the life is any more felicitous than the earlier: "I look round, and see what I remember to have seen in happier days. I rest against a tree, and consider, that in the same shade I once disputed upon the annual overflow of the Nile with a friend who is now silent in the grave. I cast my eyes upwards, fix them on the changing moon, and think with pain on the vicissitudes of life" (p. 695-96). The overflowing Nile, a familiar

figure in Rasselas, here highlights the contrast between the seemingly relentless regularity of nature and the mutability of man. That the same moon which delights the younger people reminds the old man of the instability of life subtly prepares us for the conclusion of the chapter where Imlac alone believes the sage's discom-forting story typical of man's existence. The old man himself relies on what is surely the solace provided by the Christian doctrine of immortality. He tells the others, "My mind is burthened with no heavy crime, and therefore I compose myself to tranquility; . . . expect, with serene humility, that hour which nature cannot long delay; and hope to possess in a better state that happiness which here I could not find, and that virtue which here I have not attained" (p. 697).

The narrative returns to the astronomer, who is cured of his madness by the society of Nekayah, Pekuah, Imlac, and Rasselas. Then the five discuss the advantages and drawbacks to the monastic life at St. Anthony's and conclude that solitude in this case is excusable, perhaps even praiseworthy, since its express purpose is to prepare the monks for the afterlife. "Their devotion prepares them for another state," Imlac explains, "and reminds them of its approach, while it fits them for it. . . . their

toils are cheerful, because they consider them as acts of piety, by which they are always advancing towards endless felicity" (p. 703). The monks have freed themselves from many worldly considerations which, when they interfere with man's working out his salvation, become vices:

Pleasure, in itself harmless, may become mischievous, by endearing to us a state which we know to be transient and probatory, and withdrawing our thoughts from that, of which every hour brings us nearer to the beginning, and of which no length of time will bring us to the end. Mortification is not virtuous in itself, nor has any other use, but that it disengages us from the allurements of sense. In the state of future perfection, to which we all aspire, there will be pleasure without danger, and security without restraint. (p. 704)

Explicit and concise, this statement summarizes many of the arguments from various parts of the apologue: man's present existence in a transient, precarious, limited life is a trial; if he does not allow himself to become of this world but keeps as his primary goal his salvation, then he may be rewarded in an afterlife of eternal security and pleasure.

Earlier I suggested that the pyramids in Rasselas serve a double function, representing the vanity of human wishes and memento mori. As we turn now to the work's conclusion and its second conspicuous symbol, the catacombs, it is interesting to note how "the ancient repositories" (as Imlac calls them) convey a similar dual

significance. The visit to the Christian tombs is motivated by the impulse that motivates all action in Rasselas, infinite human yearnings, this time expressed specifically as the desire for novelty: Imlac tells the Abissinians, "Your curiosity . . . has been so general, and your pursuit of knowledge so vigorous, that novelties are not now very easily to be found: but what you can no longer procure from the living may be given by the dead." He then suggests a visit to the catacombs, to which Rasselas replies, "I know not . . . what pleasure the sight of the catacombs can afford; but, since nothing else is offered, I am resolved to view them, and shall place this with many other things which I have done, because I would do something" (p. 704). Perhaps an indication of the apologue's movement appears in the emphasis Johnson places on the symbolic aspects of the pyramids and the catacombs. Recall that the former were representations primarily of the insatiable hunger of man's imagination and secondarily of the impermanence of life; the catacombs, on the other hand, while they are introduced as objects to fill man's psychic void, are developed at length as memento mori in the climactic penultimate chapter of the work.

Most of chapter XLVIII is taken up with Imlac's metaphysical argument for the immortality of the soul, perhaps the most clear and most concise version that the

eighteenth century produced. The argument was so widespread and Johnson's treatment so eclectic that to search for specific sources would be pointless; suffice it to say that most of what appears in Rasselas could have been garnered from Clarke and Wollaston. Only the briefest summary of the now-familiar argument is called for here.

Imlac is concerned to establish the immateriality of mind, and does so by the use of the integrity of consciousness concept, combined with an examination of the essential qualities of matter and the effects of those qualities:

It was never supposed that cogitation is inherent in matter, or that every particle is a thinking being. Yet, if any part of matter be devoid of thought, what part can we suppose to think? Matter can differ from matter only in form, density, bulk, motion, and direction of motion: to which of these, however varied or combined, can consciousness be annexed? To be round or square, to be solid or fluid, to be great or little, to be moved slowly or swiftly one way or another, are modes of material existence, all equally alien from the nature of cogitation.

Imlac next refutes two challenges to his position. The first comes from those who "urge that matter may have qualities with which we are unacquainted." "He who will determine, returned Imlac, against that which he knows, because there may be something which he knows not; he that can set hypothetical possibility against acknowledged certainty, is not to be admitted among reasonable beings" (p. 706). Then, to the view we have seen frequently before, in Locke and others, that to find it

impossible that matter may think is to limit arrogantly the Creator's power, the poet responds, "It is no limitation of omnipotence . . . to suppose that one thing is not consistent with another, that the same proposition cannot be at once true and false, that the same number cannot be even and odd, that cogitation cannot be conferred on that which is created incapable of cogitation" (p. 706-07). Finally, for the benefit of Nekayah, Imlac makes the necessary connection between immateriality and immortality: "Immateriality seems to imply a natural power of perpetual duration as a consequence of exemption from all causes of decay: whatever perishes, is destroyed by the solution of its contexture, and separation of its parts; nor can we conceive how that which has no parts, and therefore admits no solution, can be naturally corrupted or impaired" (p. 707).

That the metaphysical proof was still available to the Christian apologist at the time Rasselas was written but with impaired effectiveness I have established earlier, and part of Johnson's use of it in a climactic yet limited role in his apologue can certainly be traced, I believe, to the proof's fading influence. Another, more particularly Johnsonian reason for its confined use in Rasselas can be found in the sermon Johnson wrote for the funeral of his wife:

Some of the philosophers . . . have endeavoured to overpower the force of death by arguments, and to dispel the gloom by the light of reason. They inquired into the nature of the soul of man, and showed, at least probably, that it is a substance distinct from matter, and, therefore, independent on the body, and exempt from dissolution and corruption. The arguments, whether physical or moral, upon which they established this doctrine, it is not necessary to recount to a Christian audience, by whom it is believed upon more certain proofs, and higher authority; since though they were such as might determine the calm mind of a philosopher, inquisitive only after truth, and uninfluenced by external objects; yet they were such as required leisure and capacity, not allowed in general to mankind; they were such as many could never understand, and of which, therefore, the efficacy and comfort were confined to a small number, without any benefit to the unenlightened multitude.

Johnson goes on, "though continual contemplation of matter will, I believe, show it, at length, wholly incapable of motion, sensation, or order, by any powers of its own, and, therefore, necessarily establish the immateriality, and, probably, the immortality of the soul; yet there never can be expected a time, in which the gross body of mankind can attend to such speculations, or can comprehend them."³⁵ Johnson apparently liked the metaphysical argument himself, but despite his personal taste, his fear that the proof would be beyond many of the people to whom its conclusion would be of vital importance forbade his reliance on it entirely either in the sermon, or, as I have argued, in Rasselas.

Johnson moves in Rasselas, just as he does in the funeral sermon, from the metaphysical proof to a higher

authority, Christian revelation. After Imlac has completed his argument, Nekayah comments, "But the Being . . . whom I fear to name, the Being which made the soul, can destroy it."

He, surely, can destroy it, answered Imlac, since, however unperishable, it receives from a superiour nature its power of duration. That it will not perish by any inherent cause of decay, or principle of corruption, may be shown by philosophy; but philosophy can tell no more. That it will not be annihilated by him that made it, we must humbly learn from higher authority. (p. 707)

Thus Imlac stresses the perilous contingency of all human existence and paves the way for the sombre conclusion of the memento mori theme.

After the group has stood silent for awhile, apparently profoundly affected by contemplation of their own inevitable end, Rasselas suggests that they return "from this scene of mortality. How gloomy would be these mansions of the dead to him who did not know that he shall never die Those that lie here stretched before us, the wise and the powerful of ancient times, warn us to remember the shortness of our present state: they were, perhaps, snatched away while they were busy, like us, in the choice of life." Now occurs what I believe is one of the most significant sentences in Rasselas and a sentence whose full implications have not yet been explored: "To me, said the princess,

the choice of life is become less important; I hope hereafter to think only on the choice of eternity" (pp. 707-08). In one sense, of course, no Christian is permitted to choose immediate death over life. In another sense, and this perhaps is the way the majority of readers have taken the phrase, a Christian may choose eternity by endeavouring to lead the type of life which will result, via the grace of God, in eternal salvation. But this again somehow implies that Rasselas is concerned with morality in a narrow sense, with the avoidance of sin and with virtuous conduct. As I have argued above, there is little previously in the work to support this view. How then should we take Nekayah's assertion?

If we consider the phrase "choice of eternity" in terms of the arguments for immortality that have been advanced throughout Rasselas, its meaning becomes clear. Following Rasselas' statement of the despair that is the burden of all those who do not share a belief that their souls will not perish, what more logical meaning can Nekayah's statement have than that she will now choose to believe in her personal immortality? This is the type of choice of eternity that Francis Gastrell urges upon his audience near the conclusion of his argument from desire: "All that remains then to be considered by us, is; whether it be more reasonable and comfortable to

believe that we are mortal, or immortal creatures; and which is the wisest and most becoming choice a man can make, to desire and endeavour to be like God, or to be content with being like the beasts that perish" (p. 77).

By regarding the choice of eternity as a decision to believe in the immortality of the soul rather than some type of rejection of earthly existence or of sinful behaviour, we remove the conflict which apparently exists between the last two chapters of Johnson's apologue. In "The Conclusion, in Which Nothing Is Concluded" the four from Abissinia and the now sane astronomer are confined indoors by the rising of the Nile and are forced to fall back for diversion upon relating various schemes of happiness each has formed. Pekuah hopes to retire from the world as prioress of a religious order, Nekayah to acquire and communicate wisdom as the president of a woman's college, and Rasselas to govern justly a little kingdom. We know, however, that such wishes are vain: Pekuah's convent would not provide the "unvariable state" she seeks; the princess could never acquire knowledge of "all sciences" and her idyllic educational Eden is surely impossible to achieve; Rasselas' own unchecked imagination indicates the unattainable nature of his wish, for "he could never fix the limits of his dominion, and was always adding to the number of his subjects." Though "Imlac and the astronomer

were contented to be driven along the stream of life without directing their course to any particular port," I see no particular reason to dissociate them from the previous three in coming to the realization that "Of these wishes that they had formed they well knew that none could be obtained" (pp. 708-09).³⁶ For to wish, Johnson has said throughout Rasselas, is to be human, and through an awareness of the impossibility of satisfying his desires in this life, a strong argument is made for man's life after death. I suggest, then, that this final chapter continues the argument from desire that has run throughout Rasselas and thus is a different argument but to the same end as the chapter that precedes it. When the companions resolve, after "the inundation should cease, to return to Abissinia" (p. 709), their final recorded act enforces a basic part of the argument from desire, that men will continually shift from one posture to another and back again so long as they live. The only unvariable state in Johnson's system is a timeless one.

NOTES

¹Those who disagree with Boswell, for various reasons, include Patrick O'Flaherty, op. cit., and John Aden, "Rasselas and The Vanity of Human Wishes," Criticism, 3 (1961), 295-303. Aden presents a consistent if unconvincing argument to read Rasselas as a satire and concludes, "Far from being a prose version of The Vanity of Human Wishes, Rasselas seems rather a repudiation of the pessimistic and melancholy doctrine of the poem" (p. 303). Support for Boswell's view can be found in the opinions of David Nichol Smith, CHEL (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1913), X, 178-79; Gwin Kolb, "The Structure of Rasselas," p. 699; Thomas R. Preston, "The Biblical Context of Johnson's Rasselas," PMLA, 84 (1969), 274-81; et al.

²Sheridan Baker, "Rasselas: Psychological Irony and Romance," PQ, 45 (1966), 250-51; see also Walter Jackson Bate, The Achievement of Samuel Johnson (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1955), pp. 63-91. The latter contains a study of "The Hunger of Imagination" in Johnson's writings that is a masterpiece, and I am indebted to it probably more than I realize. Still, Bate consistently ignores the religious motive and the religious consequence of this theme in Johnson's thought.

³See Sachs' first chapter, "The Vacuity of Life," esp. pp. 5-6, 10-11.

⁴Samuel Johnson: Rasselas, Poems, and Selected Prose, ed. Bertrand H. Bronson, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Rinehart, 1971), p. 608; hereafter cited in the text. The similarity of the happy valley and Milton's Eden has been noted before: see for instance Mary Lascelles, "Rasselas Reconsidered," E&S, 4 (1951), 42. It has also frequently been observed that even in the first chapter of Rasselas, Johnson undercuts somewhat his blissful description by references to confinement or imprisonment: a recent discussion of this point is provided by Carey McIntosh, The Choice of Life: Samuel Johnson and the World of Fiction (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1973), pp. 174-78.

⁵Cicero: De Officiis: On Duties, trans. Harry G. Edinger (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1974), pp. 8-9, I, 11; hereafter cited in the text by book and section number.

⁶Collected Works of Oliver Goldsmith, ed. Arthur Friedman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), II, 186-87; hereafter cited in the text. Friedman notes a similarity between this passage and Rambler 41.

⁷Works, I, 264.

⁸This becomes one of the minor motifs of Rasselas: the prince soon after this complains, "sleep will no longer hide me from myself"; in Cairo he lives in crowds "not so much to enjoy company as to shun myself"; and an old man the travellers meet late in the work comments, "Nothing is now of much importance; for I cannot extend my interest beyond myself" (pp. 613, 642, 696).

⁹J. P. Hardy, ed., Johnson: The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1968), pp. 141-42n: "The 'choice of life' (*Bevæ oxpevis, vitarum electio*) was, in one context or another, a frequent topos in classical literature. Of most relevance for Rasselas is its occurrence in Cicero's De Officiis, i. 32-33 (115, 117, 119)." Hopefully, an essay written by the late Professor Earl Wasserman on the choice of life in Rasselas will soon be made available in print. I understand from a brief conversation with Professor Wasserman shortly before his death that his essay stresses the moral nature of Rasselas' choice, a view which my study opposes.

¹⁰This is a recurrent idea in Johnson: see, esp., Rambler 184 and Boswell, II, 22; II, 114; III, 363.

¹¹For a useful outline of the literary tradition that Rasselas rejects, see Brigitte Scheer-Schazler, "Heracles and Bunyan's Pilgrim," CL, 23 (1971), 240-54, which traces the topos of the way and the related choice of life from Prodikos to Bunyan. Though Scheer-Schazler speaks of the "christianization of the motif, and the change from the choice between two possible courses of earthly life to a choice between this world and the next" (p. 249) and in a certain sense I believe this describes the action of Rasselas, I would insist that the radical difference between Bunyan's allegory and Johnson's apologue exists in the distinction between Pilgrim's constantly recurring

moral choices and the absence of such choices in Rasselas. A recent essay by Thomas M. Curley, "The Spiritual Journey Moralized in Rasselas," Anglia, 91 (1973), 35-55, regards The Pilgrim's Progress as a "narrative and thematic blueprint" for Rasselas; I find this essay a mass of severely strained analogies and, therefore, completely unconvincing.

¹² Philanthropos, An Essay on the Existence of God, and the Immortality of the Soul (London, 1750), p. 16; hereafter cited in the text.

¹³ For Law's influence on Johnson, see Katherine C. Balderston, "Doctor Johnson and William Law," PMLA, 75 (1960), 382-94; Maurice J. Quinlan, Samuel Johnson: A Layman's Religion (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1964), pp. 3-26; and James Gray, pp. 50-65.

¹⁴ W. K. Wimsatt, "In Praise of Rasselas: Four Notes (Converging)," Imagined Worlds: Essays on Some English Novels and Novelists in Honour of John Butt, eds. Maynard Mack and Ian Gregor (London: Methuen, 1968), p. 117; hereafter cited in the text.

¹⁵ George Brinton, "Rasselas and the Problem of Evil," PLL, 8 (1972), 96. In addition to the general objection I express above, I would venture two slight ones here: first, Rasselas' statement that "surely the equity of providence has balanced peculiar sufferings with peculiar enjoyments" is far from the echo of Jenyns' optimism that Brinton believes it is; second, surely Brinton mistakes the meaning of Johnson's expression "want of necessaries" when he finds this a description of the state of the happy valley (p. 94).

¹⁶ The only other discussion of Johnson's ideas about evil I have encountered is by Chester Chapin, The Religious Thought, pp. 106-110. Here Chapin uses "existential evil" to describe, as far as I can tell, non-moral evil; I have chosen to treat this category as two, physical and metaphysical evil, for reasons which I hope will become obvious. Johnson, incidentally, acknowledges two of the labels I use, moral and physical evil (see Boswell, V, 117; V, 45).

¹⁷ That the general movement of this section of Rasselas is deliberately away from considerations of physical evil and toward considerations of metaphysical evil is borne out by the decision Rasselas and Nekayah make to examine only the high and middle stations of life in the particular

search for happiness that leads to their extended discussion (p. 654). Nekayah tells us specifically, "I did not seek ease among the poor, because I concluded that there it could not be found" (p. 657). Poverty was perhaps the prime representation of physical evil to Johnson: recall his treatment of it in his "Review of Soame Jenyns' A Free Enquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil" and in the Life of Savage.

¹⁸ Johnson's tendency to regard the choice of marriage as analagous in its problems to the choice of life is apparent also in several of his Rambler essays. This remark from No. 45, for example,--"Whoever feels great pain, naturally hopes for ease from change of posture; he changes it, and finds himself equally tormented"--without a context seems to refer to the choice of life more than the choice of marriage. In fact, it refers to both, as do several similar statements in the essay. Cf. also the opening of No. 207: "Such is the emptiness of human enjoyment, that we are always impatient of the present. Attainment is followed by neglect, and possession by disgust; and the malicious remark of the Greek epigrammatist on marriage may be applied to every other course of life, that its two days of happiness are the first and the last" Works, I, 292; IV, 204.

¹⁹ The one secular happiness Johnson seems consistently to admit is that of novelty, but it by definition is a transcient pleasure: see Rasselas, pp. 667, 696. An important aspect of Rasselas that deserves further study is Johnson's philosophy of doing, i.e., the need for man to gain temporary respite from the disappointments and ennui of life through novel activity.

²⁰ Sermon XV, Works, XVI, 255.

²¹ Both Paul Kent Alkon and Robert Voitle seem to accept the double-ending view of Rasselas. Alkon specifically adopts Krutch's view, emphasizes the unrelieved gloom of the vanity of human wishes theme, and concludes that Rasselas is "primarily devoted to the presentation rather than to the solution of a difficult problem" (Samuel Johnson and Moral Discipline [Northwestern Univ. Press, 1967], p. 197). Voitle writes that even in chapter XLVIII "we are more struck by the opportunity Johnson missed to dwell on the de contemptu mundi theme than by his passing reference to it. The reader is left with no feeling that Rasselas was written for some ulterior moral purpose, as so many tales of this nature are. It deals

with the nature of man and his pursuit of happiness in an uncertain world. These are subject enough, as Johnson confirms by returning to them in the final chapter" (p. 40).

²² Emrys Jones, "The Artistic Form of Rasselas," RES, 18 (1967), 400-01. Despite its title, Magdi Wahba's "A Note on the Manner of Concluding in Rasselas," Bicentenary Essays on Rasselas, ed. M. Wahba (Cairo, 1959), pp. 105-110, sheds no light on this subject.

²³ On memento mori in Johnson's thought and writings in general, see J. H. Hagstrum, "On Dr. Johnson's Fear of Death," pp. 315-17.

²⁴ Thomas Blacklock concludes his essay "On the Immortality of the Soul" with a traditional exhortation to memento mori, in which he comments, "The whole life of a philosopher ought to be one contemplation on death" (p. 231). Johnson himself, in the funeral sermon for his wife, displays similar logic: "who can see the final period of all human schemes and undertakings [specifically, a funeral], without conviction of the vanity of all that terminates in the present state? . . . And who, when he sees the vanity of all terrestrial advantages, can forbear to wish for a more permanent and certain happiness?" Sermon XXV, Works, XVI, 374-75.

²⁵ See Carey McIntosh, pp. 190-92; in my unpublished MA thesis (Univ. of Florida, 1971), I had anticipated many of Professor McIntosh's arguments concerning the way Johnson prepares us for the eschatological theme of chapter XLVIII, which I now reiterate.

²⁶ Ecclesiastes 12:1; Johnson: History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia, ed. George Birkbeck Hill (1887; rpt. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), pp. 176-77n.

²⁷ Sermon IV, Works, XVI, 123.

²⁸ "That death is certain, every one knows; nor is it less known, that life is destroyed, at all ages, by a thousand causes Yet, as the thought of dissolution is dreadful, we do not willingly admit it; the desire of life is connected with animation; every living being shrinks from his destruction" Sermon X, Works, XVI, 191-92.

²⁹ Idler 41, Sat., Jan. 27, 1759, Works, V, 219. And compare: "To afford adequate consolations to the last hour, to cheer the gloomy passage through the valley of the shadow of death, and to ease that anxiety, to which beings, prescient of their own dissolution, and conscious of their own

danger, must be necessarily exposed, is the privilege only of revealed religion" Sermon XXV, Works, XVI, 364.

³⁰ I modify phrases Arieah Sachs borrows from Johnson himself; see Sachs, pp. 3-19.

³¹ For a thorough, traditional treatment, see Sachs, pp. 35-37.

³² Arguing for a six part structure in Rasselas, W. K. Wimsatt remarks, "The visit to the Pyramids which begins [the fifth] part, or ends the preceding, seems like a heavy punctuation mark (the accent of antiquity and the tomb), and this indeed is echoed in a second and similar punctuation, the visit to the Catacombs, which signals the end of the whole" (p. 116).

³³ Sermon XV, Works, XVI, 252-53.

³⁴ Cf. Imlac's earlier statement, "Our minds, like our bodies, are in continual flux; something is hourly lost, and something acquired" (p. 677).

³⁵ Sermon XXV, Works, XVI, 367-68. Cf. the Taylor-Johnson Letter . . . on the Subject of a Future State: "But the reasons above [arguments metaphysical, moral, and from desire], as they could only be collected by the speculative and the wise, could not exert sufficient influence upon the generality of mankind," Gray, p. 237. Here Johnson's point is that no proofs but "the great doctrine of the resurrection" exert sufficient general influence.

³⁶ The question of whether Imlac and the astronomer are to be included in those who know their wishes could not be obtained has been discussed by Gwin J. Kolb, "Textual Cruxes in Rasselas," Johnsonian Studies, ed. Magdi Wahba (Cairo, 1962), 261-62, and Mahmoud Manzalaoui, "A Textual Crux in the Concluding Chapter of Rasselas," Cairo Studies in English, ed. Magdi Wahba (Cairo, 1963-66), pp. 213-16. This, like the debate about whether the travellers intend to return to the happy valley or only to Abissinia (also summarized in Kolb, pp. 257-60), has probably been discussed at greater length and trouble than it warrants. Neither "crux" is important to my reading.

CONCLUSION

The failure of previous critics to recognize the harmony in the conclusion Johnson provided to The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia, served as the immediate impetus for this study before it was undertaken and demonstrates its necessity now that it is completed. After Rasselas has been examined in terms of the issue of immortality, an issue extremely important at the time the work was composed both personally to its author and generally to its audience, not only do we see that its last chapter fittingly concludes the argument for immortality that has run throughout but also we realize that the penultimate chapter is part and parcel of the same theme, albeit in a somewhat different form. Similarly, the entire final third of Rasselas prepares us for the eschatological concerns of the last chapter but one by means of the frequent repetition of a traditional Christian concept closely linked to immortality, the memento mori.

The various forms that the argument for immortality took in the decades immediately preceding the publication

of Rasselas were the subject of the first two chapters of my study. There I showed that during this time the Christian apologist employed three main arguments to support the doctrine of immortality. Two of these arguments, the moral and the metaphysical, drew increasing opposition from various philosophical and heterodox religious parties. On the other hand, the third argument, the argument from desire, grew stronger as the century advanced and, not surprisingly then, occupies a transcendent position among all three arguments in Johnson's apologue.

A reading of Rasselas within the context provided by contemporary arguments about the immortality of the soul casts new light not only on the ending but on the beginning and middle of the work as well. Whether man was essentially different from, or indeed superior to, animal creation was perhaps the most important side-issue in discussions about immortality in the eighteenth century. At the very beginning of his apologue, Johnson announces his position on this issue, and thus commences his argument in favor of the immortal soul of man, by having his titular hero insist that man is essentially distinct from brute. Johnson's position on this point, probably based on common sense as well as conservative

Christian tradition, is illustrated again, more casually this time, later in the apologue, when Imlac explains to Rasselas that Europeans are more powerful than Asia-ticks and Africans "because they are wiser; knowledge will always predominate over ignorance, as man governs the other animals" (p. 630).

The discussion of marriage between Rasselas and his sister Nekayah that occurs almost exactly halfway through the work is a section that has been largely ignored by commentators. When the discussion is treated, however, in terms of the nature of evil in Rasselas (a topic suggested by my investigation of the difference between the moral argument and the argument from desire and a topic hitherto untouched), it clearly emerges as a synecdoche for the more comprehensive choice of life motif and as, therefore, an important contribution to Johnson's version of the argument from desire. The difficulties of the choice of marriage are analogous to those of the choice of life, being a function of the inability of any finite institution to satisfy man's infinite desires. Even without moral or physical evil, Johnson implies, marriage (and life) often is a state where much is to be endured, primarily because of man's finitude. Thus, Johnson treats marriage in Rasselas not just on a social or moral but on a religious plane as well.

In addition to casting new light on previously untreated sections and topics in Rasselas, my work suggests that a traditional way of approaching the work needs to be expanded. To concentrate on the vanity of human wishes theme (which is undoubtedly present) without going beyond to examine the use Johnson makes of it is seriously to misunderstand the work. Rasselas conveys a Christian rather than a Hebraic message, and once we recognize that Christian apologists advancing the moral argument or the argument from desire for man's immortality consistently had recourse as a starting point to the idea of the vanity of all things under the sun, that message comes through quite clearly. Now, I do not believe that the inability of that message to get through consistently before this is entirely a result of an ahistorical bias on the part of modern readers. The editor of the 1903 edition of Johnson's Works found it necessary even then to emphasize that Rasselas differed from other works which ridiculed mortal wishes, prospects, and pursuits "by pointing to a loftier and more lasting state" (VII, 3), so as early as the beginning of this century Rasselas was in danger of being misunderstood by those who failed to recognize the Christian conclusion to the argument initiated from the ancient Hebraic stance. I do believe, however, that George Orwell was right when he called attention to the disappearance of a belief in personal immortality in the modern period:

I do not know whether, officially, there has been any alteration in Christian doctrine. . . . But what I do know is that belief in survival after death--the individual survival of John Smith, still conscious of himself as John Smith--is enormously less widespread than it was. Even among professing Christians it is probably decaying: other people, as a rule, don't even entertain the possibility that it might be true. But our forefathers, so far as we know, did believe in it. . . . Life on earth, as they saw it, was simply a short period of preparation for an infinitely more important life beyond the grave. But that notion has disappeared, or is disappearing, and the consequences have not really been faced.

Orwell continues,

I do not want the belief in life after death to return, and in any case it is not likely to return. What I do point out is that its disappearance has left a big hole, and that we ought to take notice of that fact.¹

If Orwell is right, a specific, documented reading of Rasselas which stresses its over-riding theme of the immortality of man is essential if we are not to lose forever an appreciation of the original meaning of the work. So, it has been the argument of this study that in 1759, quite close to the death of his mother, Johnson turned specifically to a topic that his other writings show was never far from his mind and addressed himself in Rasselas to demonstrating, perhaps as much for his own pacification as for the edification of his audience, the personal immortality of man.

NOTES

¹The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell, ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1968), III, 102, 103.

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